Spring 2021

Institutionalized Perceptions of Student Behavior and the Student Conduct Paradigm Shift in Virginia's Public Schools

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INSTITUTIONALIZED PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT BEHAVIOR AND THE STUDENT CONDUCT PARADIGM SHIFT IN VIRGINIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
May 2021

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ABSTRACT

INSTITUTIONALIZED PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT BEHAVIOR AND THE STUDENT CONDUCT PARADIGM SHIFT IN VIRGINIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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In 2019, the Virginia Board of Education approved the *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension* as a framework for school divisions to revise student behavior practices and policies. The model guidance reflects substantive changes in procedure, language, and data collection as compared to prior sanctions-based codes of conduct. The goal of the model guidance is to implement a balanced approach to student behavior through proactive, constructive, and equitable practices. Consistent with current research, the guidance indicates a significant emphasis on social-emotional learning, intervention, and restorative practices. The language, coding, and expectations of the state guidance cannot interrupt the suspension cycle alone; rather, school divisions will need to actualize a comprehensive pedagogical shift in practice and culture relative to student behavior.

Educational leaders have struggled with the paradox between the commitment to expand equity for all children and the existing student conduct and discipline paradigm. This qualitative exploratory case study sought to reveal educator perceptions toward student behavior and school discipline in a single urban public school division in Virginia. I conducted a division-wide survey and 18 semi-structured interviews of teachers, behavior intervention staff, and school leaders. Data was collected iteratively and analyzed through multiple rounds of coding. Taken together with an examination of research related to human behavior and Virginia's new code of conduct, the findings revealed both congruous and incongruous beliefs relative to student

behavior. A primary implication for this study is an increased understanding of existing staff perceptions and responses to student behavior that serves as a baseline for planning how to acculturate school staff to the new Virginia code of conduct paradigm.

I dedicate this dissertation to several individuals who are my sources of inspiration, direction, and energy. First, to my partner, best friend and husband, Gregory Hardy. Thank you for your unfailing support, confidence, and respect. You have always made certain that I don't miss out on anything regardless of my long hours. The Yin to my Yang, you are my balance in life. I love our adventures and cherish every memory we share. Whenever I face personal or professional adversity, I always know you will be there as my soft place to fall. You keep me encouraged and focused. I am humbled by your discipline and how you live life with the mantra "failure is not an option." You are my hero, my champion, and my beacon.

I also dedicate this dissertation to our family. To our three children, Courtney, Zachariah, and Victoria, you are our greatest achievements. I am blessed to be your mother. Thank you for being my cheering section and understanding my long hours. You demonstrate impressive work ethic, service to others, faith, and courage. You make me proud every day and I look forward to sharing many more memories with you. To my parents, Donna and Bill Demarest, thank you for the life you afforded me and the values you instilled in me. You have both made sacrifices for your family and you exemplify generosity. I am a life-long learner because of the value you placed on education. Your encouragement gives me momentum and confidence. To my siblings, Tara-Jeanne Tompkins, Trea Claypool, and William Demarest III, thank you for supporting this journey. I am honored to be your big sister. I celebrate your achievements and your commitments to continuous improvement in education, your communities, and our world. And to my faith family, the congregation at Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Hampton, led by Reverend Rhonda Wheeler, thank you for the much-needed prayers and encouragement that fill my soul.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the first teacher I ever knew, Joan Witwer (Grammy). You have been a source of strength and wisdom throughout my entire life. Your

stories and joy in teaching inspired me, from a very young age, to become a teacher. Some of my fondest memories as a child were the summer days when we played school on your back porch. You have celebrated all of my achievements along my journey. My growth mindset comes from your words reminding me that “Errors and challenges are just opportunities to learn something new.” You are a model of resilience, compassion, and grace; your legacy reaches far and wide.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this dissertation marks an exciting end to a long journey, as well as a high point in my professional career. I could never have achieved this alone and I have many people to thank for support and guidance. First, thank you to my dissertation chair, Dr. Steve Myran, for your wisdom, patience, and feedback throughout this project. You helped me to find and explore a topic from which I have learned, grown, and gained inspiration. Thank you also to the professors in the Educational Leadership department at Old Dominion University for providing a forum for intellectual discourse, rich conversations, and timely research relative to K-12 education. You have challenged me to expand the lens through which I examine issues, explore opportunities, discover knowledge, and lead others in K-12 education and beyond. I also appreciate the public school leaders who have inspired, supported, and coached me throughout my career, as well as the colleagues who have helped me to grow as an educator. And finally, to the past, present, and future educators and educational leaders, thank you for the sacrifices you make to serve young people so that we can continue to grow and improve as a community and a nation.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The evolution of public education in America parallels the country's social, economic, and political changes. Neo-managerial emphasis on efficiency and accountability dominates the organizational policies that govern public schools, including those related to codes of student conduct. Student behavior is one of the most prevalent challenges public schools continue to face. The literature indicates historical and current codes of student conduct focused on permissible sanctions for behaviors and did not encourage or require schools to recognize the changing needs of student populations, focus on prevention, implement interventions, or consider alternatives to suspension (Skiba & Losen, 2016). Suspension data are evidence of universalistic mechanisms and deeply-rooted assumptions that fail students in modern public schools. Those beliefs and practices contribute to inequity and "achievement debt" (Ladson-Billings, 2006), as well as increased potential for students to become drop-outs and/or involved in the injustice system.

Until 2019, the Virginia code of conduct for student discipline was a sanction-based bureaucratic mechanism to maintain order and compliance in public schools. Given the history of public education, staggering suspension data, and a deeper understanding of the variables that contribute to student behavior, it is evident why the Virginia Board of Education has made a comprehensive revision in the student code of conduct. The new Virginia *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension (2019)* reflects a paradigm shift in how school staff will need to think about and respond to student behavior. Virginia's guidelines call for systemic changes in adult behavior. Recognition and understanding of the variables that influence behavior will be essential to the implementation and

sustainability of a balanced framework for student behavior. Staff receptivity to the new code of conduct will depend on their beliefs and understanding about human behavior.

Chapter 2 serves as the foundation for this study. To understand the current context of public education and the issues relative to student behavior, the reader will examine a brief history of public education including its origins, changes during and post-industrial revolution, relevant legislation, the influence of zero-tolerance policies, and the impact of modern accountability systems. The literature review includes an explanation of historical and current practices relative to disciplinary consequences, as well as data relevant to sanctions-based disciplinary systems. Then, I explore the physiological, social, emotional, and environmental influences on behavior. Finally, the literature review dissects the Student Behavior and Administrative Response (SBAR) system in Virginia's *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension (2019)* including the philosophy, structural components, and core beliefs.

To create a context in which the philosophical and structural components of the new code are feasible, we must identify institutionalized perceptions of and practice relative to student behavior and evaluate for congruence with the new paradigm. The study included a survey and interviews of building administrators (principals, assistant principals), instructional personnel (regular education teachers, special education teachers, and academic interventionist), and behavioral personnel (behavior interventionists, behavior specialists, and deans) from both elementary and secondary schools in a selected school division in Virginia. Given the intent to discover educator beliefs and assumptions, a qualitative study was an appropriate methodology. The survey and interviews included questions that addressed the three main research questions:

1. What are the institutionalized beliefs and perceptions relative to student behavior?

2. Building off the above, how are educator beliefs similar to or different from current research on behavior?
3. How are educator beliefs similar to or different from Virginia's 2019 *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*?

I analyzed data through multiple rounds of coding to discover themes and patterns within the data. In Chapter 3, I define the data collection and data analysis procedures for this qualitative study. In Chapter 4, I explain the analytical process through which I examined the data and reveals the findings of the study in response to the original research questions. Finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss opportunities for future research, as well as opportunities for action as a result of this study.

Tyack (1974) warns educational reforms often fail when changes are made at a superficial level. Reforms that rely entirely on changes to policies and operational systems often fall short of full implementation. A commonly ignored challenge of reform is how institutionalized values and norms contribute to policy interpretation and fidelity to procedural execution. The momentum needed for sustainable improvement comes from systemic changes in norms, beliefs, and behavior throughout the organization. Personal life experiences, family dynamics, culture, values, education, and professional learning contribute to the lens or perspective through which individuals view, process information, and respond to issues and challenges. Social and organizational norms create the frame and inform practice.

Complex educational reform relies on school leaders to recognize the assumptions, beliefs, and mechanisms that contribute to and protect existing norms (Myran & Sutherland, 2018). Data from this study yielded existing school leader, instructional staff, and behavioral

staff perceptions and school processes. The analysis will reflect congruence and/or incongruence with the core beliefs of Virginia's new code of conduct. Given the recent timing of this legislative change, there is a lack of current research relative to this phenomenon. This study served as a critical first step for determining how to lay the foundation for the paradigm shift to Virginia's *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension (2019).*

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Background and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to reveal adult perceptions of student behavior and discipline in Virginia's public schools. To establish a context for the study, the literature review unpacks the historical foundation for student conduct practices, defines the sanctions-based paradigm, and examines the secondary consequences of those practices. This chapter also explores the functions of and influences on student behavior, as well as Virginia's previous *Code of Student Conduct* to the 2019 *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*. The following research questions created the framework to guide the discovery and analysis of the beliefs and assumptions that needed to be addressed to prepare for full implementation of Virginia's 2019 model guidance:

- What are the institutionalized beliefs and perceptions relative to student behavior?
- Building off the above, how are educator beliefs similar to or different from current research on behavior?
- How are educator beliefs similar to or different from Virginia's 2019 *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*?

Origins of America's Public School System

Drawing from Cuban (2003) and Tyack (1974), the history of public education over the past two centuries is full of reforms and counter-reforms in response to social, political, industrial, technological, and economic changes. In the early 1600s, settlers escaped religious persecution in Europe and sought to practice religion safely in a new land. Puritan and Quaker settlements relied on common religious beliefs and dictatorial authority to maintain order and

collective commitment to God and the community over self (Martin & Nuzzi, 2001). Schools reflected the same utility. From the colonial period to the early 1800s, grammar schools, often one-room schoolhouses, had a singular function – reinforce social values and provide the fundamental knowledge and skills necessary to maintain an orderly way of life in rural and agrarian communities. Through the 18th century, rural towns needed few professionals with specialized knowledge, therefore most individuals attended rudimentary ungraded schools until the early teenage years and then became part of the labor force most relevant to the individual community (Tyack, 1974). Village schools, as Tyack calls them, were as unique as the communities they served.

Pre-industrial revolution schools reflected the values, as well as the social, political, religious, and economic identities of the rural communities they served. In addition to academic lessons, schools hosted community events, town meetings, religious services, recreational activities, holiday gatherings, and markets. Differences among schools stretched beyond how communities used the physical buildings. The authority and power to make decisions regulating school practices varied from one town to the next (Tyack, 1974). Curricula reflected the available resources, as well as the skills and knowledge youth needed to learn in order to keep the town functioning. Little or no recruiting meant communities selected teaching staff from among available options within the town. Rural communities embraced the individuality of their schools; however, the limitations and isolation established early inequities that remain today.

Urbanization and The Industrial Revolution

The American Revolution was a catalyst for social, political, economic, and educational changes in America. The founding fathers called for the colonies to unite in the pursuit of a pluralistic society. As America gained independence, key figures in history influenced the

centralization of public schools. Thomas Jefferson, for example, declared the need for the younger generation to access and gain more sophisticated knowledge and skills for the young nation to grow beyond its rudimentary beginnings (Martin & Nuzzi, 2001). He believed schools represented the future of literacy and communication, industry and technology, medicine and health, finance and the economy, politics, and global relations. Thus, a movement began to consolidate and acculturate schools based on the American identity. Many supported the concept of schools as a forum for individuals to embrace the values of democracy and develop into responsible and contributing citizens (Daly & Fowler, 1988). Unfortunately, not all of America's inhabitants earned the title "citizen"; therefore, public schools remained inaccessible to marginalized populations who were already disadvantaged - individuals living in poverty, indentured servants, and enslaved people.

Urbanization in America started in the early 1800s as the country expanded westward across new territory. Small towns tripled in size to become cities and increased demands on infrastructure, technology, and industry. Rural agrarian towns lost their allure and schools began to lose their community-centric identities (Tyack, 1974). Village schools struggled to serve the increasing volume and diversity of the student population. Mobility within the growing nation reinforced support for the public school system to assimilate a common standard of professionalism and academics. As Tyack (1974) reveals, "a community-dominated and essentially provincial form of education could no longer equip youth to deal either with the changed demands of agriculture itself or with the complex nature of citizenship in a technological, urban society" (p. 14). The movement to bureaucratize, consolidate, and professionalize schools gained popularity and momentum.

Values and norms also changed as homogeneous towns gave way to complex and diverse cities. Members of early rural towns previously shared common values. Behavior patterns passed informally from generation to generation within families and were reinforced by the community, church, and school. Small towns shared mechanisms for teaching and monitoring socially appropriate behavior. As mobility increased, people migrated from different communities into new cities and brought different and sometimes conflicting values, norms, and behavior patterns. People began to feel their perceptions of order and social identity were threatened. To maintain order, growing cities had to formalize discipline mechanisms for addressing behavior on the streets and in schools (Tyack, 1974).

The Industrial Revolution sparked significant improvements in manufacturing that impacted the landscape of the country and its educational system. External pressures to update facilities, structures, curriculum, resources, and teaching expectations prompted the need for increased management and regulation. As technology and industry increased in specialization, schools had to respond with opportunities for students to gain specialized training, knowledge, and credentials for employability. Schools struggled to maintain pace with changing industrial demands. The desire to maintain control of the American identity stimulated the movement to increase structure and efficiency through authority. By the 1890s, schools served as "a critical means of transforming the pre-industrial culture - values and attitudes, work habits, time orientation, even recreations - of citizens in a modernizing society" (Tyack, 1974, p. 29).

In the shadow of the industrial revolution, Frederick Taylor's (1911) Scientific Management Theory influenced schools to run more like factories to reach maximum efficiency through standardization (Myran & Sutherland, 2018; Tyack, 1974). Urban school governance structures arose and empowered school principals to function as middle managers (Wallace

Foundation, 2013) responsible for delegating, directing, and monitoring all operations. Teachers were responsible for running their classrooms based on the institutionalized norms the principal set. Authoritative hierarchy established the expectation for students to know and comply with the established norms (Gullick & Urwick, 1937). As schools focused more on order and efficiency over individualism, they adapted industrialized organizational norms, expectations, and systems to meet the needs of the cultural majority (Garibaldi, 1992; Gay, 1993). As a result, schools did not adequately address the needs of marginalized populations who fell into the minority (cultural, racial, socioeconomic, linguistic, or disabled). Bureaucracy increased consistency; however, power struggles and competing social values across the country increased equity concerns.

Post-Industrial Revolution

John Dewey and the Progressive Movement attempted to draw attention back to democratic values - equal opportunity, community identity, and respect for diversity (Cuban, 2003; Dewey, 1916). Dewey characterized learning as a social experience and defined the acquisition of knowledge as essential to improve and reconstruct society. Pedagogically, the movement spurred shifts in curriculum offerings, instructional practice, and learning experiences. Emphasis on balanced learning for life included a blend of core academic content and pragmatic life skills. Community service and service-learning reflected an increased commitment to social responsibility. Tyack (1974) recognizes, “bureaucratic models developed to reform city schools became educational blueprints for consolidation of rural education in the early twentieth century” (p. 7).

During the early 20th century, urban schools reflected America’s political conflicts and priorities. Social justice reform efforts promoting equity and access for more members of society clashed with the momentum of bureaucracy focused on order for the masses over the needs of

the individual (Levine, 1971). The number of one-room schoolhouses went from 200,000 in 1910 to 20,000 by 1960 (Tyack, 1974). Student enrollment and the number of public schools significantly increased. The first half of the 20th century was defined by tremendous national and global conflict that challenged social and financial progress. World wars and the Great Depression led to financial strains on all public services and institutions, including education, and a wider divide between the haves and have nots.

Significant social challenges and subsequent legislative changes in the mid-20th century impacted public education dramatically (Cuban, 2003). The Civil Rights Movement of the 1940s – 1960s sparked debates about the equity of one-size-fits-all instructional models, as well as racial segregation. These debates called to light the access and achievement gaps that perpetuate the inherent social and financial inequity for low-income, minority, and disabled children (Cuban, 2003; Fabelo, Thompson, Plotkin, Carmichael, Marchbanks, & Booth, 2011; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016). The Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to overturn *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) called for the desegregation of schools as a first step to addressing racial disparity in public education. Title VI of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* furthered the cause to prohibit discrimination (racial, religious, and gender) by ending segregation. The 1974 *Equal Educational Opportunities Act* guaranteed access to all students regardless of race, color, sex, or national origin and required specialized resources to support the needs of English Language Learners. Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* continued the fight for equity by calling for equal access to all children regardless of disability. Public Law 94-142, also known as the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975* (later amended as the *Individuals with Disabilities Act* of 1990 and 2004), called for schools to address the needs of all learners, regardless of ability or disability (Essex, 2012).

Legislation of this period prompted additional reforms that targeted inequities for disadvantaged populations and redefined the context of public education.

The Accountability Era

In the latter part of the 20th century, political pressure increased as a result of the declining achievement of America's schools in comparison to those of other countries. The response was a shift back to standardization. Several key documents contributed momentum to the early stages of the standards-based movement (Vinovskis, 2009). In 1983, the publication of *A Nation At Risk* provoked fears about nationwide deficits in literacy, writing, math, and science. The report called for increased consistency and equity among public schools, which bolstered support for the standards-based movement (Jorgensen & Hoffmann, 2003). *AMERICA 2000: An Education Strategy* (1991), based on President George Bush's charge, and *Goals 2000* (1994), under President Clinton's leadership, articulated goals for increased student achievement across the country. External pressures from elected officials increased as public confidence decreased and threatened the survival of public education.

President George W. Bush signed into law the 2002 reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Act*, also known as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB, 2001) to increase standardization and efficiency, as well as regain public trust in education (Peck, Reitzug, & West, 2013; Vinovskis, 2009). This legislation required each state to adopt and implement a comprehensive series of content and performance standards to monitor and measure incremental and continuous progress for all students (Jorgensen & Hoffmann, 2003). The spirit of the law reflected a commitment to address inequities relative to socioeconomics, culture, race, language, citizenship status, gender, and ability. The standards movement gained political popularity as an effort to reduce achievement gaps and increase equity for all learners. Opponents expressed

concerns that the law was based on economic priorities that would narrow learning for students and would not address increasing behavior and school safety concerns (Au, 2011). Schools began intensive data collection on student learning and conduct which yielded quantifiable concerns.

States needed to disaggregate student achievement data to evaluate if the standards movement had an impact on declining academic achievement or inequities for specific populations. This ignited the accountability movement. Proponents pushed for one-size-fits-all assessment systems to measure student learning outcomes. The results drove division level and school level self-monitoring and action planning for continuous improvement. High stakes assessment and increased school accountability standards, designed to produce increased quality control indicative of NeoTaylorism (Au, 2011), ultimately led to the imposition of sanctions for schools and school divisions that failed to meet designated benchmarks. The government intended the sanctions to compel school leaders to find ways to increase student achievement and meet the standards (Peck, Reitzug, & West, 2013). Thus, the work of school leaders in challenging schools shifted to address external pressures, such as standardized test results, rather than quality learning for all (Shipps & White, 2009). Efforts to regulate learning expectations for all students across each state and the nation produced prescriptive curricula and reduced instructional autonomy. It quickly became evident the mission of the standards and accountability movements clashed with the values of the Progressive movement.

Increased federal, state, and local accountability pressures, as well as concerns with achievement gaps, stimulated reform efforts into the 21st century. Proponents of the standards-movement advocated for high standards for all students and equitable performance expectations across all states. Opponents argued against sanctions as inherent disadvantages for marginalized

populations (low socioeconomic status, minority, English Learners, students with disabilities). The standards movement created a frame for teaching and learning; however, the accountability movement raised awareness that standards and sanctions alone do not narrow achievement gaps. Inherent inequities must be addressed at a deeper level. While the political arena and the context of public education changed, educational paradigms did not evolve significantly and some schools and children continued to fall behind (Betts, 1992). Congress enacted and President Barack Obama signed into law the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* (2015) as a revised reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Act*, and a replacement to *No Child Left Behind. ESSA* defines expectations for schools to provide equitable opportunity through differentiated and complex systems that address the academic, social emotional, and behavioral needs of diverse learners.

The complexity of 21st century modern society makes bureaucratic structures of the past antiquated (Levine, 1971). The operational and logistical challenges of running a school require efficiency and routines to function (Levine, 1971; Willower, 1970). The pressure on school leaders is to ensure collective productivity over individual gain. This runs counter to the values of Democracy. Increased routinization contributes to decreased personalization. The hierarchical structure of public schools continues to expand in layers and roles thus increasing the potential for communication gaps and schisms among members of the organization (Willower, 1970). The truism is evident - the ideal of individual support to ensure learning (cognitive and behavioral) for every student cannot be realized while school leaders and staff yield to the beliefs inherent among the bureaucratic, institutionalized structures of public education.

Student Discipline

While the spirit of 20th century legislation and reform efforts is to meet all children where they are and support them equitably to reach their potential, one area remains that has not seen significant improvement - student discipline. The term discipline has been interpreted for decades as a synonym for punishment. Discipline refers to the methods individuals use to teach and/or train the behavior of others (Greene, 2014; Hyman, Bilus, Dennehy, Feldman, Flanagan, Lovoratano, Maital & McDowell, 1979). Student behavior has been a top concern among America's public schools for centuries, and it continues to be a source of great debate among educators today (Allman & Slate, 2011; Hyman et al., 1979; Morris & Howard, 2003). In education, discipline previously had a singular purpose - address misbehavior to maintain order and safety (Daly & Fowler, 1988). Until recently, discipline models have relied heavily on punitive methods to address behavior. Current research supports the need to consider more positive and proactive interactions with students to address behavior concerns; however, a reactionary punitive paradigm still prevails.

Foundations of School Discipline

Historically, schools have functioned with an authoritarian hand when it comes to maintaining order in the school environment. Throughout the 19th century, many teachers and school leaders shared a common philosophy - when a student does not succeed, assign the blame to the student (Tyack, 1974). If a student did not learn a concept or skill, it was presumed to be the result of his/her ineptitude or indolence. Children who behaved inappropriately earned labels such as unruly and willful. With the goals of efficiency and expediency, academic failure and behavior offenses received disciplinary consequences regardless of the root cause or the student's ability to understand, regulate, or control the behavior. Responses to student

misbehavior included parent reports, verbal chastisement, before and after-school detention, financial restitution, corporal punishment, suspension, and expulsion (Allman & Slate, 2011; Martin & Nuzzi, 2001; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Sugai & Horner, 1999; Townsend, 2000). By the 20th century, opponents of corporal punishment identified the practice as unjust, inconsistently applied, and inhumane (Martin & Nuzzi, 2001; Middleton, 2008). In response, thirty-one (31) states have enacted legislation to ban corporal punishment; however, nineteen (19) states still use it as a disciplinary response. All of the other consequences remain in active use in schools with limited or no regulation.

Sanctions-based disciplinary paradigms default to a belief indicative of neo-managerialism: challenging behavior has a cost and students have to pay a consequence. Payment comes in the form of exclusion from the learning environment. The most restrictive sanctions for misbehavior include in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion. Suspension, the forced absence from class or school, became a popular method to address behavior offenses in the 1960s. The rationale for suspension is to remove disruption by removing the disruptive student from the environment to regain safety, order, and learning (Forsyth, Howat, Pei, Forsyth, Asmus & Stokes, 2013). Expulsion is the permanent removal of a student from the learning environment. Out-of-school suspension requires a student to remain off the school property and have no contact with school staff or peers on school property for a designated number of days (Amuso, 2007). To reduce the volume of out-of-school suspensions, schools have relied increasingly on in-school suspensions (Amuso, 2007). In-school suspension typically requires the student to report to the school, remain isolated from the general population, and work independently on academic and/or punitive assignments for a designated period of time or days. Adults supervise students during in-school suspension, but in most cases provide little to

no instruction (Morris & Howard, 2003). All three dispositions are considered exclusionary practices because students lose access to traditional learning experiences for a specified amount of time. Without appropriate supports and interventions, in-school suspensions change the setting but not the outcome. Both types of removal deny a student access to academic, emotional, and behavioral support.

Contemporary School Discipline

In the 1980s, as part of the war on drugs, United States military and law enforcement agencies adopted "zero-tolerance" policies to address criminal behavior related to drugs. Zero tolerance equates to heavy sanctions for specific behavior violations regardless of circumstances, context, or impact (Allman & Slate, 2011; Losen, 2015; Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). In 1986, President Reagan's administration introduced zero-tolerance to schools to address drug-related infractions, gun violence, and gang influence in schools (Allman & Slate, 2011; Skiba, 2014). By 1993 many school boards around the country adopted zero-tolerance policies in hopes of addressing concerns with school safety. In 1994, President Clinton's administration further fueled the movement by passing the *Gun Free Schools Act* under the *Improving America's Schools Act* (Allman & Slate, 2011; United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). These policies justified suspension and exclusionary practices for students perceived as threats to the operation and safety of schools. In the wake of increasing school violence beginning in the 1990s, schools and communities hoped zero-tolerance policies would be the solution.

Zero-tolerance policies are extreme measures intended to address a small minority of all school behavior offenses. School attacks, violence, drug use, gang activity, and weapons were the intended targets of initial zero-tolerance policies (Morrison, Anthony, Storino & Dillon, 2001; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Schools and communities began to fear minor disruptive

behavior as the underpinning of disorder and violence. *No Child Left Behind* provided teachers the authority to remove students from classrooms for disruptive behavior. Removals addressed behavior concerns in the short-term but did not address underlying causes or correct behaviors. Media attention to incidents such as the 1999 shooting at Columbine High School impelled schools to apply zero-tolerance policies to a wider range of behaviors with unmonitored latitude.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) began collecting data relative to zero-tolerance policies for dangerous violations in the 1990s. In 1998, data analysis revealed over 75% of schools in the country adopted zero-tolerance policies for tobacco, alcohol, drug, and weapons violations (Allman & Slate, 2011). In 2009, the NCES publicized data that showed the volume of those offenses had not declined significantly despite the extreme policies. In contrast, schools that were less likely to exercise zero-tolerance policies had the lowest reported crime while schools more likely to embrace the harsh measures remained less safe (Mayer & Leone, 1999; Skiba & Losen, 2016; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Educators believed severe consequences for extreme behaviors would be a deterrent, however, they have not had a significant preventive impact.

Zero-tolerance policies lack root cause analysis and proactive support (Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Root cause analysis is necessary to reveal the triggers or factors that contribute to a behavior such as mental health concerns, acute childhood experiences, response to trauma, and academic frustrations. While root causes are not excuses for undesired behavior, it is essential to analyze contributing factors to better understand and respond to behavior. To address behavior appropriately, schools must analyze the root causes and develop complex systems to foster the conditions necessary to address challenging behavior (Myran & Sutherland, 2018). Without appropriate guidance, children have to intuit alternative behaviors and the tools

to overcome conditions or experiences that contribute to their behavior. When contributing variables remain unaddressed, behavior is not likely to improve (Skiba, 2000).

The intent of zero-tolerance policies is not to teach appropriate behavior, rather they are intended to create deterrents to undesirable behavior in order to increase student compliance so that school authority maintains power. This philosophy relies on two key assumptions: (1) fear of sanctions will coerce children into obedience and compliance; and (2) children already have the necessary skills to make appropriate behavior choices (Skiba, 2004). Excluded students often do not understand the causes for their behavior or recognize the impact it has on others. Without instruction, reflection, and understanding relative to the behavior, the student does not gain the knowledge, tools, or skills to avoid repeating the behavior in the future. As Greene (2014) contends, children inherently want to behave appropriately but need instruction and support to know what appropriate behavior looks like and how to achieve it. Removal alone does not teach a lesson about or modify student behavior. Without intervention, students return to the school and/or the classroom setting with no new understanding or skills and are not likely to break the cycle.

Zero-tolerance policies have thwarted some violent and dangerous acts; however, the volume of serious offenses is a small portion of total behavior offenses schools address. Zero-tolerance policies rely on the core belief that rigid enforcement of even minor offenses is a deterrent for all levels of behavior (Skiba, 2014). The most frequent classroom referrals are for non-violent behaviors such as disruption, defiance, and disrespect (Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002). In contrast to the intended targets of zero-tolerance policies, schools often assign suspensions for offenses such as absenteeism, tardies, profanity, and minor disruption. Those lesser offenses do not present significant safety concerns, but they do account for the

majority of behavior infractions that receive suspensions (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019; Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). The Zero Tolerance Task Force, under the American Psychological Association, examined extensive data relative to zero-tolerance policies and determined the application of zero-tolerance has become a one size fits all practice that does not positively influence school climate, school safety, or student learning (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019).

In addition to suspension and expulsion, schools have begun to use alternative placements and alternative education programs to address behavior concerns. Students typically receive alternative placements as a result of offenses that threaten safety, however there is a great degree of variability across the country regarding placement criteria and program offerings. There is also significant variability in the services available among alternative education programs. Some alternative programs provide "counseling, social work intervention, and non-traditional schedules" (Allman & Slate, 2011, p. 5) while others provide academic instruction to small groups of students, and others provide nothing more than in-school suspension in an alternative facility. Concerns about alternative education programs include: teacher training, fidelity to curricula, limited comprehensive curriculum offerings, access to student supports (academic, social emotional, mental health), and lack of behavior intervention. While alternative education programs offer another option to keep students in a school setting, rather than excluding them entirely, they are far from a perfect solution.

Consequences of Suspension

Data from the past 30 years confirm schools continue to use suspension and exclusion, under the zero-tolerance umbrella, to push out an increasing volume of students. Between 1973 and 2010, the suspension rate across the nation doubled (Losen & Gillespie, 2012). During the

2015-16 school year, over 2.7 million students in public schools throughout the country received at least one suspension (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). Approximately 19,000 students are suspended nationwide on any given school day. With over 3.45 million suspensions and 110,000 expulsions each year (Green, 2014; Losen, 2015), student behavior continues to push children out of schools at an alarming rate.

The consequences of exclusionary practices such as suspension are well documented (Allman & Slate, 2011; Anyon, Jenson, Altschul, Farrar, McQueen, Greer, Downing & Simmons, 2014; Forsythe et al., 2013; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Losen, 2015). There are times when the removal of a student from the learning environment is necessary to protect immediate safety. Suspension alone, however, will not address the safety concern in the long-term. Without other support, students do not learn how to behave differently in future incidents. Sanctions-based practices neither address the root cause of behavior challenges nor attempt to address lagging skills. In academic terms, it is like removing access to language arts instruction, reading support, and print text from a student who is weak in reading and then expecting the student to develop stronger reading comprehension on his/her own. Without appropriate support, students who lack the necessary skills for appropriate behavior tend to fall further behind.

Suspensions create a cycle that causes students to fall behind academically and socially. Dupper (1998) concludes, “Suspension and other zero-tolerance discipline practice as a response to student misbehavior is unjustified, ineffective, and contributes to the school failure of many students” (p. 354). Exclusion and suspension lead to increased frustration, anxiety, stress; decreased self-worth; and feelings of isolation, humiliation, distrust towards adults and the school (Allman & Slate, 2011; Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Losen, 2015). Those feelings lead to increased absenteeism and school avoidance. Lost access to instruction leads to disinterest,

disengagement, learning gaps, frustration, academic failure, and grade level retention (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Fabelo et al., 2011; United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). Suspension temporarily removes behavior concerns, but the potential consequences are often disproportionate to the original behavior.

There is a strong negative correlation between high levels of student discipline and low student achievement (Skiba et al., 2015). The Council of State Government Justice Center conducted a study in 2011 and determined that 31% of all students who were suspended or expelled were retained to repeat at least one grade level. This reflects a significant difference from the 5% rate of retention for non-suspended students (Fabelo et al., 2011). The study includes an examination of the impact on graduation potential and found an increased likelihood of dropping out for students who experienced suspensions or expulsions. The study was controlled for student demographics and school characteristics in order to conclude the impacting factors were student behavior and school sanctions. Balfanz, Byrnes, and Fox (2014) conclude in their study, the risk of becoming a dropout increases from 16% to 32% for students who were suspended at least one time in 9th grade. Suspension is one of the strongest predictors of a student's potential to become a dropout (Balfanz, Herzog, & MacIver, 2007; DeRidder, 1991; Losen, 2015; United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019).

The long-term effects of zero-tolerance policies have been psychologically and socially traumatic for many students (Skiba, 2014; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Invasive school practices that fall under zero-tolerance include interrogations, pat downs, and strip searches prior to suspension, exclusion, and expulsion. These often result in emotional humiliation, as well as disconnection from and anger toward the school environment, thus increasing the likelihood of future behavior issues, sanctions, academic failure, and dropping out (Allman & Slate, 2011;

Greene, 2014; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Exclusion from school for any length of time deprives a student of opportunities to access direct instruction relative to communication and behavior, as well as models of appropriate behavior. The likelihood to reoffend increases for students with each subsequent suspension (Allman & Slate, 2011; Ambrose & Gibson, 1995; Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000; Costenbader & Markson, 1994). Sanctions-based policies increase the potential for repeated or escalating behaviors for students already disadvantaged, thus placing those students at further risk for recidivism. No research exists to show a causal relationship, but the correlation suggests high predictability of a cyclical effect that negatively impacts the individual student and the overall school.

Inequity in School Discipline

The disproportionate application of conduct policies on historically disadvantaged student populations is well researched (Harry & Anderson, 1995; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Skiba & Losen, 2016; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997; United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). Zero-tolerance policies have increased existing disparities in discipline and suspension rates. Minority students and students with disabilities have a greater rate of suspension than their White and non-disabled peers. The Children's Defense Fund conducted a study in 1975 and concluded suspension and exclusion rates were nearly three times higher for African American students (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Black, Native American, and Latino students receive more exclusionary discipline and lengthier suspensions for the same or less severe behaviors than White students (Losen & Martinez, 2013; Skiba & Losen, 2016; Skiba et al., 2002; United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). The suspension rate for students with disabilities is twice the suspension rate for non-disabled students with the suspensions for students with disabilities often lasting longer than for their non-disabled peers. Controversy over

the effectiveness and impact of suspension continues to increase as the disparity and inequity become more evident.

Teachers, administrators, and school climate impact how individual schools address student behavior (Anyon et al., 2014; Ferguson, 2001; Morris, Finnegan, & Wu, 2005). Teacher and administrator cultural expectations, perceptions of language patterns, fear of specific student groups, and frustrations with power struggle contribute to inconsistency in referrals and discipline decisions. Disparity arises when one population of students receives unfair or disproportionately harsh treatment as compared to other students. Minority students receive a significantly greater volume of office referrals and exclusionary consequences even though they account for a significantly smaller percentage of students nationwide (Davis & Jordan, 1994; DeRidder, 1991; Morris et al., 2005; Skiba et al., 2002). Cultural dissonance, the disconnect between cultural expectations of the majority and the habits or customs of the minority, contributes to the disparity (Ogbu, 1982). Lack of cultural competency leads adults to create learning contexts that work counter to minority student comfort, as well as misinterpret verbal and body language patterns of minority students (Larsen, 2015; Townsend, 2000). Misunderstanding of and biased attitudes toward minority student behavior contribute to a cycle of perceived misbehavior. While the exact causes of the disparity cannot be quantified, it is evident significant disconnects exist between students and the adults who make the disciplinary decisions.

Further analysis has disproved assumptions that minority students, students from poverty, and students with disabilities receive more sanctions because their misbehaviors are more frequent and more severe (Fabelo et al., 2011; Losen, 2015; Skiba et al., 2002; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982). Data show that even when behaviors among different student populations are

similar, consequences vary significantly. Disenfranchised subgroups tend to receive suspension as a disciplinary penalty more frequently and are more likely to receive subsequent suspensions for minor offenses (Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Morrison et al., 2001; Wu et al., 1982). The data trigger questions about the fair and equitable application of discipline policies and practices intended to maintain safe and orderly learning environments.

School to Prison

School divisions currently partner with local law enforcement to provide a police presence in schools and address dangerous activity. The presence of law enforcement officers, or school resource officers, has increased dramatically over the past quarter-century. According to the Office of Civil Rights (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016), as recent as 2015, 1.6 million students in the country attended schools in which there was a law enforcement officer, but not a full-time school counselor. In addition, there were more school-based law enforcement officers (82,000) than school social workers. In those schools, the responsibilities of student management, student behavior, and school safety fell on the arm of the justice system more than on the expertise of mental health professionals.

In addition to school-based sanctions, criminal charges and referrals to the justice system have become an increasing byproduct of zero-tolerance policies. Before zero-tolerance, schools addressed misbehavior via a conference with the principal or detention. Those same behaviors now receive suspension, exclusion, and even criminal charges. Schools now refer students to the criminal justice system with greater frequency than ever before - a phenomenon commonly referred to as the "school-to-prison pipeline" (Anyon, 2014; Elias, 2013; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014; Skiba & Losen, 2016). The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights monitors discipline data and statistical analysis confirms a continued increase in the use

of suspension, as well as increased criminalization of school behavior over the past 25 years (Elias, 2013; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016). There is no definitive research to prove police presence is a cause for the increase in student referrals to the justice system; however, there is an undeniable correlation. Similar to the cyclical effect of school suspensions, juvenile detention and incarceration produce a contagion effect that leads to future criminal behavior and recidivism (Allman & Slate, 2011; Ambrose & Gibson, 1995). Zero-tolerance and sanction-based policies appear to have widened, not narrowed, the behavior gap.

Suspension also increases the likelihood for a student to become involved in juvenile delinquency and criminal activity (Losen, 2015). The cycle from school to prison begins with the reduction in access to education, which often leads to reduced school engagement. Decreased aspirations of completing compulsory education increases drop out potential, which leads to reduced employment opportunities, earning potential, fulfillment of housing and health care needs. Those adversities often lead to increased homelessness, physical illness, and hunger. The economic impact is not exclusive to the individual. Society also bears the burden of increased demands for subsidized housing, health care, food, and transportation. Increased desperation leads to criminal activity and eventually adult incarceration (Fabelo et al., 2011; Losen 2015; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2016; United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). The policies intended to reduce dangerous offenses in schools stimulate increased long-term challenges for communities and society.

The Paradox

A dichotomy exists between what educators innately want for their students relative to safety, learning, personal growth, and the consequences of adult responses to student behavior. While some argue suspensions increase control and make schools safer, research provides

evidence to the contrary. Feelings of safety and emotional well-being significantly impact self-confidence, sense of connection to community, vested interest in the health of that community, and commitment to growth and learning (Bowen & Bowen, 1999). Children who experience positive emotional well-being and feelings of safety are less likely to exhibit undesirable behavior. Suspensions do not positively impact feelings of safety, school climate, or school culture (Losen, 2011; Losen, 2015). The consequences of sanctions-based behavior responses run counter to the purpose and priorities of schools and they far outweigh the benefits (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Fabelo et al., 2011; United States Commission on Civil Rights, 2019). Schools need to focus even more on addressing behavior in meaningful and constructive ways that are in tune with students' feelings and emotional as well as physical well-being (Losen, 2015).

Behavior

A paradigm shift in how adults in schools respond to challenging student behavior requires a change in belief and understanding of student behavior. Dominant theories relative to human behavior have evolved over the past 140 years. Cursory understandings of behavior theories and neuroscience are essential to analyze how school personnel perceive and interpret student behavior.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism developed in the 1880s as a theory that human behavior is predictable based on the introduction of specific environmental stimuli. Research over the past 140 years has evolved to enhance how scientists conceptualize human behavior. Drawing from Pavlov's concept of classical conditioning, Watson and Thorndike's research revealed evidence that rewards and consequences function as environmental triggers to control human behavioral responses (Brau, Fox, & Robinson, 2020; Gokmenoglu, Eret, & Ercan, 2010; Hyman et al.,

1979). Skinner expanded on Watson and Thorndike's theory to include the influence of experience. During the period of global conflict and the explosion of technology in the early 20th century, Skinner recognized the significant impact individual life experiences had on human behavior (Gokmenoglu at al., 2010; Rogers & Skinner, 1956). Bandura and Walters (1963) reveal the significance of modeling to teach and reinforce socially appropriate behavior (Hyman et al., 1979). When applied to the educational context, behaviorist theory suggests educators can manipulate the learning environment to anticipate and manage student behavior.

Sociocultural Theory

As research throughout the 20th century reveals, behaviorist theory does not explain human behavior entirely as it is limited to the observable cause-effect relationship between stimuli and involuntary behavior. Building from behaviorist traditions, Vygotsky's (1986) research paralleled the work of Watson and Skinner; however, Vygotsky conceptualized behavior in terms of learning (Jaramillo, 1996). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory suggests learning is a social experience that requires human interaction, relationships, observation, receptive and expressive communication. According to Vygotsky, beginning in infancy and extending through the entire lifetime, humans internalize what they learn from interaction and experience. Internalized concepts and skills translate to communication and reasoning which influence behavior.

Vygotsky's (1986) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) explains the difference between guided learning and independent learning. If the task is too easy, the learner will not be stimulated for new learning. Tasks that are too challenging cause frustration. Tasks within the ZPD are optimal for cognitive and behavioral learning with support and interaction. Bruner's (1977) constructivist theory extends Vygotsky's work to explain the concept of

scaffolding as the continuum through which learning builds from existing or prior knowledge toward the ZPD. Under this construct, humans are active agents of their own learning. The evolution from behaviorist to sociocultural to constructivist theory reveals the significance of the learning context and human interaction as external stimuli. Taken together, the theories promulgate the belief that under the right conditions and with the right supports and interaction, all children can learn.

Neuroscience of Behavior

A common perception of challenging behavior is that it is conscious, willful, and deliberate (Greene, 2014). Functions of intentional behavior include several purposes: (1) disrespect, challenge, manipulate authority; (2) avoid an activity, environment, setting, people; or (3) gain attention. That is an accurate interpretation for some children and some behaviors for which traditional responses (blame, reprimand, privilege removal, isolation, and exclusion) can be effective. Adults who believe these are the only functions of behavior instinctively tend to categorize behavior into two absolutes - compliance (good) or noncompliance (bad). For children whose behaviors are deeply-rooted responses to emotional imbalance, traditional consequences can compound existing issues and increase behavior challenges rather than reduce them (Delahooke, 2019).

Behavior is a complex physical manifestation of the brain's perception of and response to stimuli and life experiences. Dr. Porges (2004) coined the term *neuroception* to explain how the human brain and body are in a constant state of surveillance for survival. The brain intakes and uses sensory information (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, and movement) to evaluate for safety or potential threat from the environment (Porges, 2004). The brain also houses the collective lifetime of memories which contribute to the positive and/or negative feelings or associations the

brain makes to specific sensory information. The brain's perceptions, feelings, and associations stimulate conscious thinking, as well as instinctive response. The brain processes sensory and informational input relative to life experiences and then communicates to the nervous system. Thoughts, decisions, and visceral reactions translate into physical action or inaction. Behavior, therefore, reflects a relationship between the brain and the body.

According to Dr. Porges's Polyvagal Theory (2009), the autonomic nervous system works to balance the brain and body's responses to environmental stimuli and stress. The autonomic nervous system stimulates four neurophysiological responses: social engagement, fight, flight, and freeze. Social engagement occurs when an individual feels emotionally and physically safe and can process and adapt to a challenge. Fight is a defensive response that results when an individual is unable to engage with a perceived emotional or physical threat. Flight is an individual's response to escape a perceived danger or threat. Freeze occurs when an individual is unable to process or respond to a perceived danger or threat and instead shuts down completely. All humans have the potential to exhibit the four neurophysiological responses, however unique life experiences, feelings of safety, and social emotional development determine each individual's threshold for dealing with challenge or stress.

Children typically have less ability to regulate their behavior and interactions than adults, which creates a challenge for schools where order is necessary for learning (Shoup & Studer, 2010). The brain develops self-regulation over time through trusting relationships with caring adults (Delahooke, 2019). While there are common milestones at which children develop levels of self-awareness, social awareness, and self-regulation, not all children can reach those competencies without intervention. Adult expectations, structures, and responses can influence how well a child achieves a sense of balance. Assumptions about an individual child's level of

self-control can contribute to challenging behavior (Delahooke, 2019). Children with little or no ability to self-regulate lack self-esteem and often have a fatalistic attitude toward life and relationships. This contributes to both the individual's behavior, as well as the climate of the class or school.

Social Emotional Development

Life experiences and social emotional development begin at birth. From the first cry, infants seek attention to their basic needs (Delahooke, 2019; Maslow, 1943). As adults respond appropriately and attend to the infant's needs, the baby feels safe and can develop regulation - the ability to maintain calm while processing new environmental stimuli. That next phase is when the infant learns to engage and connect with others. First, he/she recognizes the existence of other people. Then he/she learns to smile, look at others, laugh, and express emotions nonverbally. Then the child develops problem-solving to get what he/she wants through back and forth interaction, nonverbal and verbal cues, and early language expression. Children who lack loving interactions with adults do not develop the essential component to social emotional development - feelings of safety (Delahooke, 2019). As a result, their abilities to self-regulate, develop relationships, communicate, and problem solve can be stifled.

Childhood experiences often influence visceral responses to challenges or stress. Emotional and physical safety are essential for children to think rationally, make conscious decisions, regulate their emotions, interact appropriately with others, problem-solve through new challenges, communicate feelings, and learn (Porges, 2004). Children with healthy life experiences, a consistent feeling of safety, and social emotional tools typically respond to challenging stimuli and stress through social engagement and problem-solving. Children who have experienced life trauma or adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) tend to have a heightened

sense of danger (Delahooke, 2017; Simmons, 2020). Their responses may be intensified based on faulty neuroception or a subconscious false sense of threat or danger. Challenging behaviors serve as an adaptational defense mechanism against a pervasive feeling of danger or threat.

Adaptational Behavior

Goleman and Davidson (2017) categorize behaviors as "top down" or "bottom up" responses to stimuli. Top down behaviors are intentional choices made with volitional control using the executive functioning from the prefrontal cortex of the brain (Siegel & Bryson, 2014). Top down behaviors reflect logic, reason, and flexibility, and they require sophisticated and conscious decisions. This is the part of the brain that allows for learning and adaptation. In contrast, bottom up behaviors are visceral and involuntary reactions driven by the limbic system, specifically the amygdala. Bottom up behaviors reflect heightened emotional responses as adaptations for survival and can hijack the brain when there is a perceived threat. Both types of behaviors develop over time as the individual adds new experiences, relationships, and coping strategies to his/her life.

Dr. Porges's Polyvagal Theory defines how the three parts of the autonomic nervous system each function in response to stress: the ventral vagal system, sympathetic nervous system, and dorsal vagal system (Delahooke, 2019; Porges, 2009). When the ventral vagal system is activated, the individual feels safe and can respond to and engage with challenges using health adaptation skills. This leads to a state of social engagement through which the individual can communicate, build relationships, be creative, and learn. When the sympathetic nervous system is activated, the individual responds to a perceived threat with a fight or flight response for survival. The individual can become volatile, defensive, or appear erratic. When the dorsal vagal system is activated, the individual perceives a threat and shuts down to avoid a crash. He/she

cannot physically function, think, or communicate. Excessive time in the state controlled by the dorsal vagal system or sympathetic nervous system can lead to toxic stress from which recovery becomes increasingly more difficult.

Behavior provides clues to a child's emotional and mental state (Greene, 2014). Lillas and Turnbull (2009) identify the physical indicators adults can use to ascertain which system of the autonomic nervous system is active. Children in a state of social engagement (ventral vagal system) make eye contact with people and things. They appear engaged, alert, and receptive to new information or environmental stimuli. They are physically relaxed, able to move with coordination, and can adjust rate and volume based on feedback. They can verbally and physically demonstrate a full range of emotions. In a state of fight or flight (sympathetic nervous system), children appear angry, disgusted, frustrated. They tend to clench their facial muscles and either lack eye contact or make intense eye contact. The body is tense in preparation to flee or defend. This can lead to impulsive physical or verbal outbursts, high in volume and aggression. In a state of shutdown (dorsal vagal system), children tend to stare, look around without focus, put their heads down, and appear tired. The face shows little to no affect and the voice is devoid of intonation. The body appears to droop while movements are slow and lack deliberation or coordination. It is important to recognize the signs to gauge the appropriate response to avoid pushing a child into a heightened fight, flight, or freeze response.

Root Causes of Challenging Behavior

One reason behavior intervention and discipline fail is the lack of attention to etiology (Delahooke, 2019; Greene, 2014). Behavior etiology is the root cause or set of contributing variables. It is difficult to evaluate and address behavior appropriately without an understanding of the cause(s). In the absence of root cause analysis or understanding of the adaptive nature of

non-purposeful behavior, adults fall back to common assumptions and treatment efforts (Delahooke, 2019). One instinct is to see behaviors as symptoms of a diagnosable condition and apply consequences as a treatment to eradicate atypical behavior (Delahooke, 2019; Greene, 2014). The National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) encourages a shift to focus less on diagnosing conditions and more on the causes of behavior and how to respond to them (Delahooke, 2019).

Traditional interventions and consequences often fail to address challenging student behavior because they lack customization. Common treatments for superficially similar behaviors are not always appropriate. Symptoms can be manifestations of different root causes. Unless the response aligns to the cause, environments and stimuli can contribute to a child's diminished feelings or perception of safety. In addition, the child's perception of the treatment is essential or it can be counterproductive (Delahooke, 2019). To support challenging student behavior, adults must identify the root cause and tailor targeted or intensive support based on individual needs.

Physiological conditions can also contribute to an individual's ability to control emotional or physical responses to stress. Conditions may exist at birth or be developed over time. Examples include bowel disorders, skeletal misalignment, arthritis, and cancer (Delahooke, 2019). These disorders produce chronic pain or sensitivity, which lessens a child's ability to deal with additional stimuli. Neurodiversity can also impact brain function and communication. Conditions include dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Autism Spectrum, and Tourette's Syndrome (Delahooke, 2019). These conditions impact how the brain perceives sensory input, as well as send the body messages. The results include hypersensitivity and over-

reaction (Delahooke, 2019; Greene, 2014). Behaviors related to these conditions are symptoms that require care before consequence.

The existence or history of trauma is another root cause of challenging behavior. Acute Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events or experiences in an individual's life that heighten their predisposition to dysregulation. ACEs include: abuse (verbal, psychological, physical, sexual); physical neglect (basic needs); emotional neglect (communication of love, affection, or guidance); the death of an immediate family member; domestic violence; divorce; homelessness; hunger; mental illness of a family member; criminal activity by or incarceration of a family member in the home; drug or alcohol abuse by a family member (Cohen, Berliner, & Mannarino, 2010; Delahooke, 2019; Greene, 2014; Harris, 2018; Wade, Shea, Rubin, & Wood, 2014). These may negatively impact an individual's sleep cycle, physical activity, hygiene, and food consumption (Delahooke, 2019; Wade et al., 2014). During moments of perceived emotional or physical stress, the individual can experience increased heart rate, pulse, sweating, and shortness of breath (Greene, 2014). Delahooke (2019) cites research results that indicate, "Children with four (4) or more ACEs in their history are 32.6 times more likely to be diagnosed with learning and behavior problems than children with fewer or no ACEs" (p. 231). ACEs can cause feelings of abandonment, hypersensitivity to sound and light, and the inability to form healthy connections and relationships with other people, which contribute to increased likelihood of undesirable or challenging behaviors.

Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation reinforces understanding of the impact of ACEs on a child's development and ability to reach a state of self-actualization. Maslow's theory defines the hierarchy of needs that must be fulfilled for the brain to be able to maintain a state of balance. Humans have basic and psychological needs that must be met. Basic needs include

physiological needs and safety needs. Physiological needs include the fundamentals for survival - food, water, and shelter. Humans subconsciously crave physical well-being, predictability of routine, and environmental security to feel safe. Psychological needs include a sense of belonging and self-esteem. Humans seek affirmation of their worth through love, affection, achievement, and recognition. Like Ponges, Maslow defines safety as each human's primary driving force. The absence of basic or psychological needs prevents the individual from achieving balance when exposed to stress. Challenging behaviors are symptoms of the imbalance.

Environmental adversity can also contribute to trauma in the formative years. Conditions including poverty, unsafe living conditions, natural disasters, home fires, discrimination, prejudice, foster care experiences, neighborhood violence, bullying, death of a friend, and being the victim of crime significantly compromise a child's stress tolerance. The variables increase a child's potential to experience hypervigilance - increased sensitivity to or anticipation of danger (Simmons, 2020; Wade et al., 2014). Severe environmental traumas increase a child's likelihood to experience anxiety, post-traumatic stress, depression, as well as compulsive and/or challenging behavior (Cohen et al., 2010; Park & Schepp, 2015; Simmons, 2020). The trauma becomes deeply rooted and often needs mental and emotional healing. Efforts to disrupt the trauma must extend beyond changing the conditions or the context. Efforts to disrupt the behaviors related to or resulting from trauma must extend beyond sanctions and consequences.

Virginia's Code of Student Conduct

The aforementioned research helps redefine how to conceptualize student behavior and calls to question legislation and policies governing how schools address student behavior. Changes in knowledge and understanding impact the legislation, policies, and processes that

frame how schools function. Multiple decision-making bodies influence laws and policies that govern public schools in Virginia. The General Assembly is the legislative body consisting of elected officials in the senate and house of delegates. The General Assembly is responsible for passing laws that define the standards of quality and funding for public schools in the commonwealth. The Board of Education, appointed by the Governor, and the State Superintendent develop policies that govern the public school divisions throughout the state. They also make recommendations to the General Assembly based on the needs of the schools. Local School Boards and Division Superintendents govern the individual school divisions under the direction of the Board of Education. As tension and disparities grow within the public educational system, these political actors and school leaders continue to strive for ways to move schools back into balance (Shoup & Studer, 2010). The incongruence between the research and existing sanctions-based paradigms prompted changes to Virginia's Code of Conduct.

Origins of Virginia's Code

Virginia school boards and school divisions take their guidance for local codes of student conduct from § 22.1-279.6 of the *Code of Virginia.* The purpose of a statewide code of conduct is to increase consistency in how schools address student behavior. The code, specifically Title 22.1 Chapter 4 Article 3 in the *Code of Virginia* (1989), provides guidance to school divisions regarding the legal requirements, limitations, and options schools may exercise. Priorities include resource allocation, data collection, and data analysis. Virginia passed legislation in 1989, (§ 22.1-279.1 in the *Code of Virginia*) to ban the use of corporal punishment in public schools and move toward a discipline system that does not include physical punishment. The Virginia Board of Education developed its first *Student Conduct Policy Guidelines* in 1994 (Virginia Board of Education, 2015). The Board of Education made revisions to the guidelines in 2004 and has

reviewed them periodically to make language adjustments based on changes in federal and state laws. School divisions use this framework as they prepare local codes of conduct appropriate to their specific schools, communities, and student populations.

The *Code* (§ 22.1-277) defines the permissible penalties and consequences for specific offenses. Administrators have the discretion to choose from among the range of options with an expectation of consistency and fairness. Each division has developed a cause-effect system to define behavior offenses and the permissible consequences. Minor offenses include classroom behaviors such as tardies to class or inappropriate language. Major offenses include weapon violations, drugs and alcohol, and behaviors that cause injury to self or others. The code frames the grounds and procedures for sanctions including removal from class and/or instructional settings via in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, exclusion, alternative educational placements, and expulsion. Based on that guidance, the majority of school divisions across the state have subsequently adopted sanctions-based local codes of conduct.

Sanctions-Based Disciplinary Code

The Virginia Department of Education's (2015) Standards of Quality, as defined in § 22.1-253 of the *Code of Virginia*, expect school divisions and schools to develop systems to ensure an "atmosphere free of disruption and threat to persons or property and supportive of individual rights" (p. 5). The federal *Gun-free Schools Act* (1994), the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act,* and *No Child Left Behind* prompted Virginia to mandate school divisions report suspension and expulsion data annually. *No Child Left Behind* and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* require data transparency to ensure students who are assigned to schools deemed "unsafe" have the right to school choice. School divisions use student information systems to document all discipline, crime, and violence data. The Department of Education uses

the data to analyze for patterns, evaluate concerns, and publicize school safety. Discipline, Crime, and Violence (DCV) data collection has revealed the increased use of exclusionary practices and sanctions to address student behavior without an increase in feelings of safety among staff and students in schools.

The *Code of Virginia* defines how the locality or school division expects students and adults to behave in order to protect safety and learning. The DCV system lists all undesired behaviors as disciplinary infractions or violations that threaten safety and order, without concern for influence or contributing factors. The system lacks any expectation of proactive or preventive measures and focuses entirely on due process rights. Nondescript terms borrowed from law enforcement, such as disruption and disorderly conduct, served as catch-all infractions administrators can apply with ease. As a result, over the past 25 years, suspension has become the most common method to address code of conduct violations in Virginia (Allman & Slate, 2011; Breunline, Cimmarusti, Bryan-Edwards, & Hetherington, 2002; Christie, Nelson & Jolivette, 2004). Sanction-based policies, such as those of the DCV system, do not provide expectations, structures, or supports to address behavior in ways that protect safety and learning.

Changes to the Code of Conduct

New research in the 21st century further illustrates the compounding consequences of existing student conduct policies, as well as the inherent inequities in discipline dispositions. As a part of the school discipline reform movement, many states throughout the country are signing legislation to make revisions to their Codes of Conduct. Changes include: limits on expulsions; reduction of law enforcement referrals; mandates for climate and culture initiatives; requirements for corrective action plans for students; and intervention expectations for specific offenses before suspension or exclusion (Skiba & Losen, 2016). By 2016, nineteen (19) states had officially

abandoned zero-tolerance policies and developed new code of conduct frameworks designed to develop positive and proactive approaches to school discipline.

The Center for Public Integrity conducted a study in 2015 and concluded Virginia disciplinary practices resulted in a high percentage of students who received disciplinary action also received referrals from school to the juvenile justice system. With a referral to law enforcement rate nearly 30% higher than the national average, Virginia gained the reputation as leading the "school to prison pipeline" (Center for Public Integrity, 2018). Evidence suggests sanctions-based disciplinary models contribute to the risk of juveniles moving into the juvenile justice system (Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014). A research team at Virginia Tech conducted a subsequent study, known as the Lawson Study, to examine the impact and inherent disparities. The results of the study revealed a significant disparity for African American students and students with disabilities (Lawson, 2017). Among the student body in Virginia at the time, African Americans accounted for 23% of all students; however, they accounted for 49.4% percent of juvenile referrals to the court system. In addition, the DCV report revealed African American students and students with disabilities had a suspension rate nearly double that of white and non-disabled students (Virginia Board of Education, 2019). While the intent of the code was to ensure safe learning environments, it is evident the application of the code is far from equitable.

The SBAR System

Despite changing school conditions and student demographics, there were no substantive changes in the Virginia *Code* relative to student conduct prior to 2019. The Virginia Board of Education (VBOE) recognized the need to provide guidance that would help school divisions develop and implement a more equitable approach to student discipline. The VBOE revamped

the previous guidelines and in 2017-2018 developed the *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*. Approved in 2019, these guidelines deviate from the former Discipline, Crime, and Violence code system and will use a new coding system called the Student Behavior and Administrative Response (SBAR) system. The original implementation was set for August 2020; however, mandatory statewide school shutdowns related to the COVID-19 pandemic caused the VBOE to postpone the mandatory implementation. School divisions throughout Virginia will implement the new SBAR guidelines by August 2021 as part of a shift in how schools manage and respond to student behavior.

The SBAR system requires educators to provide explicit and positive approaches to teaching appropriate and acceptable behavior. Classroom and school-based staff have to apply the learning cycle to behavior with the same intentionality as core instruction. School staff must be knowledgeable about the variables and stimuli that influence behavior, including the functions of behavior, impact of trauma, and influence of social emotional competencies. This requires school personnel to build partnerships with community agencies and stakeholders as a part of a collaborative problem-solving process to help students who are unable to meet the intended expectations (Virginia Board of Education, 2019). The new Code of Conduct reflects significant changes in an effort to deinstitutionalize "constraining epistemologies and philosophies to embrace more student-centered and person-centered outlooks" (Myran & Sutherland, 2018, p. 5) and draw schools toward more proactive and preventive responses to student behavior.

Categories of Impact

In contrast to the DCV system, the SBAR guidelines define each behavior with more specific language and sort the behavior offenses into five categories based on the impact or

influence. The first category, Behaviors that impede Academic Progress (BAP), includes behaviors that negatively impact the learning of the individual student or other students (Virginia Board of Education, 2019). Five behaviors fall under the BAP category including the following: interfering with learning; scholastic dishonesty; and unexcused tardiness. These behaviors reflect the student may lack self-management or self-awareness. Students who commit offenses in this first category will benefit from instruction relative to those two competencies.

The second category, Behaviors Related to School Operations (BSO), includes behaviors that interrupt or interfere with school operations and procedures (Virginia Board of Education, 2019). These behaviors may also impact learning; however, they more directly impact operational functioning for an individual classroom, a part of the building, school-related equipment, or the overall school. There are currently fourteen (14) behaviors in this category, including the following: altering an official document or record; refusal to comply; failure to be in one's assigned place; gambling; possession of inappropriate items; and violation of the Acceptable Use of Technology/internet policy. Students exhibiting these behaviors may need to develop self-management, self-awareness, or social awareness skills.

The third category, Relationship Behaviors (RB), includes behaviors that negatively impact the relationships between two or more individuals in the school community but do not produce physical harm (Virginia Board of Education, 2019). These behaviors are also likely to impact school climate negatively. There are currently eleven (11) behaviors in this category, including the following: bullying; cyberbullying; stealing money or property; using profane or vulgar language or gestures; and failure to respond to questions or requests by staff. Students exhibiting these behaviors may need to develop relationship skills in addition to self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making.

The final two categories address behaviors that deal with safety issues. Some of the behaviors in these two categories require the school to communicate the offense to law enforcement. The fourth category, Behaviors that Present a Safety Concern (BSC), includes behavior offenses that have the potential to jeopardize safety for students, staff, and other members of the school community (Virginia Board of Education, 2019). Currently, 27 behaviors fall within the BSC category, including the following: possession, using, or distributing alcohol; harassment; engaging in reckless behavior; fighting that results in no injury; inciting or causing a substantial disturbance; sexual activity; sexual assault; stalking; stealing; leaving school grounds without permission; and weapon possession.

The fifth category, Behaviors that Endanger Self or Others (BESO), includes 17 behaviors that pose a serious risk or danger to the physical or mental health, physical or emotional safety, or general welfare of the individual student or others in the school community (Virginia Board of Education, 2019). Behaviors that rise to this level of severity are often complex. Behaviors include the following: assault; possession, use, consumption, distribution of drugs; firearm possession; gang-related behavior; hazing; and threatening, intimidating, or instigating violence, injury or harm to others. Students who commit these behavior violations typically lack social awareness and decision-making skills. Given the nature of these behaviors, schools will also need to implement the Virginia Threat Assessment protocol to evaluate risk levels to determine the appropriate responses. Responses to a BESO behavior may include mental health supports instead of or in addition to disciplinary consequences. (For a full list of behaviors by category under the SBAR system, see Appendix A.)

Leveled Response System

The SBAR framework encourages equitable responses to student behavior through a combination of instruction, intervention, and discipline. Some behaviors must be managed at the classroom level, while other behaviors rise to the level of an office referral and administrative response (Virginia Board of Education, 2019). To help schools apply the *Code* with fidelity and equity, school divisions must develop a leveled response system. The SBAR guidelines outline a 5-level system with Level 1 as the least intensive and Level 5 as the most restrictive or severe. State guidelines limit Level 1 to classroom-managed responses including but not limited to reteaching, positive recognition, conferences, reflection activities, time-out, behavior checklists, and detention. Levels 2 through 5 are considered office-managed responses. Every school division will set the specific parameters for each level to include expectations for interventions, as well as the maximum duration of permissible administrative consequences including but not limited to community service, in-school suspension, short-term suspension, long-term suspension, and expulsion. The *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension* provides a framework for school divisions without being inflexibly prescriptive.

The second element of the leveled response system is the assignment of maximum response levels to each of the 74 identified behaviors. This contrasts with the former system through which administrators could apply any of the available sanctions and disciplinary consequences without limits, oversight, or expectation for intervention (Allman & Slate, 2011). The new system creates a more comprehensive continuum of responses beginning with opportunities for students to learn and practice appropriate behaviors. When challenging behaviors reveal the need for a more targeted or intensive response, school staff move up the

continuum. Disciplinary action may include the maximum short-term suspension, long-term suspension, or expulsion depending on the severity and impact of the behavior. The expectation is the school and/or school division must evaluate the offense to determine the appropriate disciplinary response, as well as identify the necessary supports. Before assigning discipline, administrators must ensure the disciplinary response will serve one of four functions: prevent students from perceiving rewards for negative behaviors; prevent escalation; prevent significant interruptions to teaching and learning; prevent harm to others. The purpose of a leveled system is to increase consistency and equity in the application of disciplinary consequences within and among schools.

The *Code* requires school divisions to develop clear policies and procedures for when and how students will be removed from class, referred for the next level of response, and ultimately returned to the instructional setting. The SBAR system does not remove the option of sanctions entirely, as some behaviors will warrant short-term in-school and out-of-school suspensions. School-level administrators can still suspend students up to ten (10) days for students in 4th through 12th grades, and up to (3) days for students in Kindergarten through 3rd grade. A key difference is the superintendent/designee must now review and verify the existence of "aggravating circumstances" (as defined by § 22.1-277 and § 22.1-277.05 of the *Code of Virginia*) for any suspension that exceeds those school-level maximums. There is also an expectation of a support plan for the student's re-entry following suspension. The intent remains to minimize the negative impact of behavior on academic instruction. The key difference in the new system is for academic instruction and learning to continue, to the greatest extent possible, even for the student who has the behavior challenge.

Another significant change in the *Code* is the expectation for school staff to maintain authority over most student discipline and reserve police officer involvement for the most extreme situations. Zero-tolerance policies led to increased police presence in schools to increase school safety. There is limited current research to support conclusions relative to the positive or negative impact police officer presence has on school safety; however, the significant increase in criminal charges resulting from school behaviors challenges how schools exercise the partnership with law enforcement. While law enforcement will remain an active part of the school community, the *Code* is designed to reduce the frequency with which students receive criminal charges for school behaviors. Section 22.1-279.3:1.A of the *Code* identifies the specific behaviors school administrators must report to a law enforcement officer or agency. The intent is to reduce the potential for students to receive criminal charges for behaviors that should be addressed by intervention and school-level discipline. The behaviors that warrant law enforcement notification (but do not require a charge) include:

- Behaviors related to the use, consumption, possession, and/or distribution of alcohol, drugs, or controlled substances;
- Sexual aggression;
- Assault and battery that results in injury;
- Bomb threats;
- Firearm possession; and
- Use of a weapon to threaten, attempt to injure or injure school personnel, students, or others.

The intent is not to remove law enforcement entirely from the school environment; rather, it is to narrow the scope of law enforcement action and thus reduce the potential for students to be pushed into the juvenile justice system.

Social-Emotional Learning

Virginia's *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension* (2019) prioritizes prevention and positive responses to student behavior, which contrasts dramatically with the sanctions-based foundation of existing institutionalized discipline models. The new model explicitly recognizes the impact of social emotional competencies as they relate to student behavior and school culture. Each of the categories of behavior in the SBAR system identifies which lagging skills (lack of specific competencies) contribute to undesirable behavior. Educators need to understand how the competencies impact learning and behavior before they can develop and implement practices to teach the skills.

CASEL, the Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, defines five major social emotions competencies (CASEL, 2005; Graczyk, Matjasko, Weissberg, Greenberg, Elias & Zins, 2000). Self-awareness is an individual's ability to recognize his/her own emotions and values, as well as how those can contribute to behavior and relationships. Self-awareness also enables the individual to recognize and assess skills and see limitations as challenges rather than as permanent obstacles. Self-management is the individual's ability to manage or self-regulate emotions and behaviors including stress, motivation, and response to stimuli. Social awareness is the ability to understand and empathize with other individuals. This requires individuals to recognize and respect different cultural, ethical, and social norms. Relationship skills, the ability to form positive personal relationships, rely on effective communication skills

(receptive and expressive) to collaborate with others and deal with interpersonal conflict. The previous four competencies contribute to responsible decision-making - the ability to evaluate available standards, expectations, and norms to make appropriate, safe, and ethical choices. The competencies are interdependent and the lack of one or more can contribute to poor decision-making and undesirable behavior. Drawing from CASEL, the SBAR system encourages schools to embrace the responsibility to support the development of social emotional competencies as part of the overall goal to make children school, work, and life-ready.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) provides the framework for helping children, as well as adults, to develop and manage essential emotional and social skills. SEL helps individuals adapt to new or challenging circumstances (Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley & Weissberg, 2017; Graczyk et al., 2000). SEL recognizes behavior is often a reflection of how well the individual can recognize, understand and manage their own emotions and relationships. Goal-setting (personal, academic, social, etc.) and goal attainment also rely on the individual's ability to self-regulate and interact productively with others. Relationships require appropriate communication and empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings others are experiencing. Behavior also relies on the ability to make responsible decisions and choices in the face of adversity.

Multi-Tiered System of Support

The *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension* (2019) guidelines charge school divisions to create safe schools with positive school climates that ensure equity for all students. Unlike the previous one-size-fits-all code of conduct, the new SBAR system recognizes some students will need targeted intervention and support to achieve the intended behavior expectations. Schools will align research-based strategies to the specific behavioral, social emotional, and mental health needs of their students.

One essential component of the SBAR system is the use of a multi-tiered system of support. School and division-level staff will use the Virginia Tiered Systems of Support (VTSS) and Response to Intervention (RtI) frameworks as guides to identify behavior needs and align appropriate interventions. The VTSS model identifies five fundamental elements necessary to shift how schools perceive and address student behavior: an organizational culture aligned to preventive and positive approaches; data-driven decision making; research-based school and classroom practices; stakeholder partnerships; student progress monitoring; and continual reflection and evaluation (Virginia Tiered System of Supports, n.d.). Virginia launched its RtI framework in 2007 as a recursive process of core instruction and formative assessment with intervention embedded based on individual student needs (Virginia Department of Education, 2007). RtI requires proactive and ongoing efforts to evaluate learning and provide individualized intervention support before students fail. VTSS and RtI emphasize that all students do not learn at the same rate and in the same ways. Schools traditionally applied this understanding to academic content; however, it applies to behavioral learning and development as well. The new *Code* challenges schools to recognize some students need additional support to achieve common goals. Schools will collect and use data to make informed decisions about interventions, as well as monitor their effectiveness. The tiered system will help schools approach behavior and discipline as part of the learning process for all students.

Tier I of the multi-tiered system of support includes universal instruction and support for all students. Under tier I, schools will communicate school-wide behavior expectations and provide the climate and context to help students reach those behavior expectations (Virginia Board of Education, 2019). Under tier I, schools need to implement a framework for social-emotional learning (SEL). To grow each student's ability to achieve behavior expectations, tier I

instruction will intentionally focus on strategies to develop students' social emotional competencies embedded into content learning. SEL is essential to defining and reshaping the learning climate to help students recognize what appropriate behavior looks like based on school-wide expectations and norms. Tier I will also include ongoing school counseling integrated into the classroom experience, family engagement strategies, and bullying prevention. A continuum of responses will be essential for teachers to manage behavior concerns effectively, appropriately, and equitably to help all students recognize their errors and modify their behavior. Teachers will monitor, provide feedback, conference, model, adapt the context, redirect, reinforce, and facilitate practice - just as they do when teaching new content concepts and skills. Based on the tiered system of support, the process of learning appropriate behavior begins in the classroom.

Under tier II, staff will refer students to receive additional support or responses beyond the classroom. Depending on the human resources available in each school, counselors, specialized support personnel, behavior specialists, mental health professionals, and/or administrators will provide the next level of support. Tier II interventions will address lagging social emotional skills, the impact of trauma, mental and physical health concerns, and lacking basic physiological needs (water, food, shelter, clothing) (Virginia Board of Education, 2019). Interventions may include but are not limited to group and individual counseling, mediation, adjustments in the student's routine or context, restorative practices, behavior analysis, behavior plans, and referrals to community-based services. The intent of tier II is to provide students with individualized and targeted support to address the factors contributing to behavior gaps.

There will be students whose behaviors are persistent or dangerous and therefore need more intensive, tier III, responses. Students who threaten to or harm others, create a dangerous

environment, or conduct themselves in ways that are dangerous to themselves or others, will fall into that third tier for intensive support. Interventions may include but are not limited to referrals for threat assessment (using the Virginia Threat Assessment protocol), mental health assessment and service, and substance abuse education (Virginia Board of Education, 2019). Many tier III interventions and supports will require school divisions to develop strong partnerships with community agencies. This will expand the school's ability to address complex causes for behavior such as mental health issues, trauma, and family disadvantages.

Core Beliefs

Several essential beliefs serve as the impetus for the new SBAR system. First, all children are not the same. They do not all come to school with the same life experiences, family and environmental dynamics, and social emotional competencies. One-size-fits-all approaches to teaching and learning are inequitable and cause children to fall behind. There must be a baseline for determining what skills children need to develop and a framework for teaching those lagging skills. There must also be a tiered system for providing more targeted or intensive support to those who need it.

Schools must recognize how emotion and external variables contribute to behavior. While some behaviors are a reflection of choice, educators can no longer assume that is the cause. Undesirable behavior can be the result of misunderstanding expectations or cues. It can also be a manifestation of the brain's response to a set of circumstances or triggers based on the individual's life experiences. This requires belief in and processes for understanding root causes and developing trauma-informed school practices. Behavior can also be the result of lagging social emotional competencies that need to be taught before being assessed and punished. Climate and culture, and therefore relationships, are the heart of teaching and learning -

academic, behavioral, and social emotional. Relationships set the tone for learning and define how students feel about themselves, their potential, their peers, the school, the community, and their futures. Human bias can negatively contribute to relationships and human interaction. Educators must come to terms with their own bias to be able to interact positively and appropriately with students.

Another critical shift in belief is the understanding that sanctions-based exclusionary practices do not positively change behavior. Suspensions remove students from the learning environment and deprive them of learning experiences - academic and social emotional. The SBAR system recognizes there are behaviors that warrant suspension; however, not in isolation. Sanctions alone deepen learning gaps, reduce confidence, and strain relationships. To counterbalance the impact, school divisions must now permit students to make up all assignments missed during suspensions, as well as provide alternative placements during periods of long-term suspension rather than pure exclusion from academic support. Schools will need to develop re-entry procedures to review expectations and craft support plans for students as they return from suspension. Sanctions are not discouraged as an option for addressing behavior challenges; however, targeted support - emotional, behavioral, and academic - is necessary to help students re-engage, reconnect, and escape the suspension cycle.

The SBAR system requires a balanced framework of instruction, intervention, and consequences necessary for children to learn desired behaviors. Much like learning academic content, targeted instruction, consistent reinforcement, timely feedback, trusting relationships, and appropriate support are necessary to all learning. School mechanisms and educator practices shift as knowledge about academic learning increases. Likewise, schools will need to shift to

align with research relative to behavioral learning. The SBAR system challenges schools to apply the same philosophy and view behavior as a learning process.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research method and design for this qualitative case study regarding educator perceptions and current practices relative to student behavior in Virginia's public schools. This approach will allow for a deeper understanding of the institutionalized beliefs and practices among school administrators, behavioral staff, and instructional staff that may bolster or undermine the implementation of Virginia's 2019 *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*. The research plan, including the research questions, methodology, context, study participants, data collection procedures, analysis method, and ethical concerns are the primary components of this chapter.

Research Questions

I identified the following research questions:

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: What are the institutionalized beliefs and perceptions relative to student behavior?

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: Building off the above, how are educator beliefs similar to or different from current research on behavior?

RESEARCH QUESTION 3: How are educator beliefs similar to or different from Virginia's 2019 *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*?

Methodology

Given the intent of this study was to discover beliefs, in addition to practices, a qualitative study was an appropriate design (Creswell, 2002; Creswell 2003; Hammarberg,

Kirkman, & de Lacey, 2016; Williams, 2007). An in-depth exploration of current research revealed there is a lack of research relative to current educator beliefs and assumptions relative to student behavior. Synthesis of the study results yield themes and insights I contrasted with existing theories and research relative to human behavior and the Virginia Board of Education's *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension (2019)*.

Case Study Methodology

I examined the five primary qualitative designs (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, Clark & Morales, 2007) and selected a qualitative case study approach for this investigation. With its origins in sociology and anthropology (Creswell et al., 2007), case study was an appropriate method for examining beliefs about student behavior in schools. The perspectives for exploration were framed by the existing context of a sanctions-based student code of conduct. Drawing from case study tradition, the study was bounded by a single PreK-12 school division within the Commonwealth of Virginia. Consistent with the case study methodology, data collection included an open-ended survey and a series of semi-structured interviews. The choice to interview multiple individuals is consistent with the desire to discover different critical perspectives and how those perspectives intersect relative to climate within the individual school division.

I sought to conceptualize participant beliefs and practices relative to student behavior given the existing paradigm of a sanctions-based student code of conduct. Virginia's *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension (2019)* reflects a paradigm shift; therefore, effective implementation of the model guidance required discovery and recognition of institutionalized beliefs and practices

incongruous with the principles of the new model. Data from this study will inform the development of training, practices, processes, systems, and resources as a foundation for implementing the new code of conduct.

The Researcher

I have been a public educator in Virginia for twenty-five years and holds a Bachelor of Arts in English with a concentration in Secondary Education, a Masters in Educational Leadership, and a valid teaching license in the state of Virginia to include K-12 Principal Licensure. I have served as a classroom teacher, a building administrator, and a division leader. I have received training on research methods, how to conduct surveys and interviews, and data analysis. I have interviewed over 500 individuals with the intent to hire during her career. Through the post-graduate program at Old Dominion University, I have developed research skills including oral communication, listening, recording, data analysis, coding, and synthesis. She has also completed all of the required modules for social and behavioral research through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) with 100% accuracy on all related assessments.

Context

The selected school division serves approximately 19,500 students among 32 schools and programs including 1 early childhood center, 1 gifted center (grades 3 -8), 18 traditional K-5 elementary schools, 2 PreK-8 schools, 5 middle schools, 4 high schools, and 1 comprehensive alternative learning center (grades 3 -12). In addition, the school division partners with a regional alternative program in the neighboring city. Teachers (general education and special education) account for 1432 of the instructional personnel in the division. Building administrators (principals, assistant principals, and academic coordinators) account for 86 of the leadership

personnel. The school division has maintained regional accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and 100% of its schools are accredited without conditions based on state accreditation standards.

According to the Virginia Department of Education's 2019 school quality profile, the selected school division serves a diverse student population of 59.1% African American, 23.1% White, 8.6% Multiple Races, and 6.9 % Hispanic students. The schools serve more than 600 English Language Learners representing 70 different countries. A significant challenge for the division is the economic disadvantage 46% of its students and families face. For the class of 2019, 92.73% of students graduated on time according to the Virginia Department of Education's On-Time rate schedule. Graduates earned over $59 million in grants and scholarships and 64% of the graduates went on to attend a 2- or 4-year college.

The city that is home to the school division has a rich and long history. Located at the tip of a peninsula with water access to both the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, the land was originally home to Native Americans prior to European colonization. Settlers founded the city in the early 1600s, thus it maintains its reputation as the first continuously English-speaking settlement in the new land. Historically, the city hosted major battles in both the Revolutionary War and Civil War and was burned more than once during the conflicts. The city is also recognized for having the first free public school program in the country. Until 2005, the city was home to the first military fort in Virginia. That fort is now preserved because of its historical value as the point of arrival for the first enslaved Africans in 1619 and then the scene of a contraband camp in which hundreds of refugee slaves found sanctuary in the 1860s. Adjacent to the city, the oldest continuous air service base in the world, now a consolidated joint Army and Air Force base, is a significant part of the nation's defense system and home to the oldest airfield

in the state of Virginia. The school division embraces its historical roots and relies heavily on its partnerships with the local community, businesses, and military installations.

An annual Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook details all conduct-related school board policies for the selected division, as well as the discipline "rules" for student conduct. Through June 2020, the division's code of conduct reflected the previous Code of Virginia and experienced few changes over the past 25 years. The code included five behavior offense categories each defined based on perceived severity or seriousness of the offense with Category I representing the least serious offenses and Category V representing the most serious. A potential range of sanctions was assigned to each category with emphasis on the use of in-school and out-of-school suspensions as the primary consequences. A formula defined increases in length and severity of disciplinary action for repeat offenses. The previous division code of conduct, similar to the previous state code, did not address behavior as a part of the learning process, nor did it recommend or require the use of instruction or intervention.

A significant majority of violations were commonly related to disruptive behavior and disorderly conduct; however, some documented incidents included threats to safety. The most current data in the VDOE School Quality Profile reports the distribution of offenses resulting in suspension from the 2018-19 school year, including 201 alcohol, tobacco, and drug violations; 78 property offenses; 74 weapons offenses; 965 offenses against persons; 530 offenses against students; 192 offenses against staff; and 88 technology offenses. The offense with the most incidents receiving suspension was disorderly or disruptive behavior which accounted for 3645 suspensions. While some of those incidents rose to the level of threatening safety, disorderly or disruptive behavior became a catch-all violation.

Participants

The survey sample pool included 86 building administrative staff, 1434 instructional staff, and 12 behavioral staff from the elementary, combined level, middle, and high schools in the selected school division. Building administrators include 33 principals and 53 assistant principals. Instructional staff includes regular education teachers and special education teachers. Behavioral staff includes behavior interventionists, behavior specialists, restorative counselors, and deans. No parameters were set to exclude any participants on the basis of gender, age, or the number of years of experience in education. All administrative, instructional, and behavioral staff in the division have to be fluent in the English language, but English does not have to be their native language. The survey asked participants for limited demographic information, as shown in Appendix B. Questions about role, school level, and school type helped me examine the themes as they relate to individuals, as well as across professional roles and school levels.

Using stratified sampling (Patton, 2015), I selected interview participants from among the survey participants based on like responses to the demographic questions on the survey. Interview subjects represented the same roles as those from the survey; however, the sample size was significantly smaller. Participants were selected to represent a cross-section of the school levels and demographics. Interview subjects were contacted and recruited by email from among the survey participants who expressed willingness to participate in an interview. Interview participants included three participants from each role (administrative, instructional, and behavioral) at both the elementary (Kindergarten through grade 5) and secondary (grades 6 - 12) levels. I selected the first respondents (based on the time-stamped electronic responses to the Google survey) who fulfilled the following criteria: at least one male and one female per role and per school level; at least one novice (in the first 3 years of the individual's current role), one

experienced educator (with 4 - 15 years of experience in the current role or combination among two or three of the roles) and one seasoned (16+ years of experience in the current role or combination among two or three of the roles) per category; and at least one individual from a school with a high percentage of students with socioeconomic disadvantage per category at each level.

Procedures

I sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from Old Dominion University. Once approval was obtained, I submitted a request for permission from the Research, Planning & Evaluation department from the selected school division. After approval was received from the selected school division, I emailed the survey to all school administrators, instructional staff, and behavioral staff. Given the timing of the study in proximity to the winter break, the survey remained open for 4 weeks including two full weeks of workdays. Survey results yielded patterns relative to the original research questions. I used the survey data to craft and refine the interview questions. Questions asked interviewees to provide their perceptions and knowledge relative to several core principles of the model guidance. Responses included opinions, as well as anecdotal examples (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Using the predetermined selection criteria, I identified and contacted the 18 interview participants via email. Two interview candidates declined as a result of health concerns related to the pandemic. Two additional participants from the survey pool, matching the same school level, role, years of experience, and gender, agreed to participate as replacements. The 18 interviews included 3 each of building administrators, instructional staff, and behavioral staff from both elementary and secondary schools in the selected school division. Each participant signed and returned the informed consent form, as shown in Appendix C, prior to the interview.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I chose to conduct the interviews virtually as a health mitigation strategy. From among available videoconferencing services, I selected Zoom Video Conferencing because it offered secure online meeting options (Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey, & Lewis, 2019; Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016). Zoom settings were configured with a waiting room feature to ensure no other individuals joined or accessed the meetings. I used Otter.ai (n.d.c), an online advanced speech recognition software program, to transcribe each interview transcript simultaneously while conducting the interview. All participants were aware of the transcription system and provided verbal and written consent. This allowed me to give full attention to each participant. Each interview took place in a single session. Questions posed during the interviews are available in Appendix D. During the interview process, I recorded memos and field notes to capture thoughts and maintain objectivity (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Urquhart, 2013).

Case study analysis allowed for the discovery of related information and themes not previously anticipated. I then conducted multiple rounds of coding to systematically categorize, organize and analyze the data to find themes and patterns. Building off the original concept of saturation in qualitative research from Glaser and Strauss (1967), Fusch and Ness (2015) warn that researchers must seek saturation before determining they have collected enough data. In preparation, I prepared a list of additional interview volunteers in the event the original 18 did not yield patterns or themes. Given evidence of similar and overlapping patterns in the data, I did not have to extend beyond the original set of 18 participants.

Data Collection

This study included two methods of data collection: an electronic survey (through Google Forms) and semi-structured interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I sent the electronic survey (see

Appendix B) via email to all administrative, behavioral, and instructional staff in the selected school division. The survey contained a statement to notify all individuals in the participant pool that participation is voluntary and no identifiable information was collected. In addition to a few questions to identify limited demographic information, the survey contained 16 open-ended questions and two objective questions. The questions were designed to solicit participants' beliefs about the following: types of student behavior concerns; impact of behavior; factors that contribute to student behavior concerns; school practices for addressing student behavior concerns; the purposes of disciplinary consequences including suspension; priorities of existing responses to behavior; and training needs for school staff. The Google survey results populated automatically into a Google spreadsheet. I maintained the original submissions unmodified and made a copy of the results on additional spreadsheets for coding and analysis. I examined the survey results and identified several patterns to explore through the interviews.

I then conducted 18 semi-structured interviews with volunteers from among the survey participants. All participants provided written and verbal consent to participate. Interviews were conducted virtually through a web-based video conferencing system. Interviews began with an explanation of the research study and its purpose. In addition to hearing the questions verbally, participants were able to see the interview questions through the chat feature in Zoom. I asked each participant the same four open-ended questions in sequence. Participants asked for clarification however, no questions were added or removed from the sequence for any of the 18 participants. Each interview took place in a single uninterrupted session. I recorded memos to capture thoughts during and after each interview (Hays & Singh, 2012). Interview results were transcribed verbatim using Otter.ai, an online speech recognition transcription software program that generated a written transcription of each interview. No identifiable information is linked to

the interview transcripts, data analysis, or final results. Each interview participant was named using the following convention: abbreviation for school level (E for Elementary or S for Secondary) + abbreviation for the role (A for Administrative, B for Behavioral, or I for Instructional) + order of interview (1, 2, or 3). For example, the first elementary administrator interviewed was named EA1.

Data Analysis

The study included iterative analysis of survey and interview data. The first phase of data analysis took place following the collection of survey results. I examined the survey results and identified several patterns to explore through the interviews. One recurring concept was potential cognitive dissonance relative to the model guidance expectation for an instructional approach to behavior. A second pattern revealed recognition that students are individuals with different life experiences and perspectives. Responses to questions about categories of impact and responses to behavior were inconsistent. These concepts, along with the original research questions, guided the development of the four interview questions (see Appendix D for interview instrument).

The second phase of data analysis included a multi-layered approach to analyze the interview results. I used a deductive process to examine and analyze the data including several rounds of deductive coding. Round 1 included open coding and annotation of interview transcripts using marginalia. During round 2, I created a deductive codebook to identify categories of concepts that emerged in the data for each question. The codebook includes colors assigned to each concept that I then applied to each transcript. Using a spreadsheet, I captured and grouped the data thematically into one matrix per question. During round 3, I used large sheets of newsprint to map and examine the results of each question across school levels and

roles. See Appendix E for images of each stage of coding. Full transcripts, annotations, and all rounds of coding have been maintained in the audit trail.

I applied the purpose of this qualitative study, and the information synthesized in the literature review, to the analysis of the interview data. Drawing on structural guidance from Patton (1980) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), I used an inductive approach and conducted open coding of the survey and interview results to identify themes that emerged among the data. Then thematic coding guided the categorization of the data. Comparison of the results to current research and Virginia's *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension (2019)* revealed divergent themes rooted in the existing sanctions-based paradigm (Christians & Carey, 1989). As a result of the retrospective approach, I was able to examine relationships among the findings and identify themes as they emerged during the study.

Ethical Concerns

Drawing from Guba (1981), Lincoln (1995), and Shenton (2004), trustworthiness is essential to meaningful qualitative research. While validity and reliability are essential to quantitative research, the merits of qualitative research include credibility, confirmability, and transparency. To achieve credibility, I provided my qualifications as an educator and a researcher with over 25 years of experience working with students. In addition, participants for the interview were identified using a preset selection technique to avoid bias in selection. I also applied member checking after each interview to verify participant responses (Candela, 2019; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process included sending the initial transcription to the participant to review for accuracy. Interview participants were encouraged to identify incorrect interview transcriptions, as well as provide clarifications or provide additional

information to the conversation. These member checks were necessary to ensure transcripts captured each participant's voice and beliefs correctly. None of the participants identified any corrections; therefore, transcriptions did not need to be revised. Participants only had access to their responses and did not participate in the analysis of the results.

Transparency and confirmability are also important for establishing trustworthiness; therefore, I have maintained a comprehensive audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail contains all memos, letters of invitation, IRB authorization, signed informed consent forms, the original spreadsheet of survey results, visual representations of the collective survey results by question and concept, original interview transcripts, coded transcripts, and the mapped matrices of coded data from the interviews. I evaluated and revised survey and interview questions to ensure they reflected the specific research questions and to avoid leading the participants. Data were analyzed among like groups and across groups to ensure patterns and themes emerged from the data not based on anticipated findings. The audit trail provides evidence of the study design, efforts to mitigate bias, data collection, data analysis, and the analytical process.

The choice of participants in a study significantly influences the findings. I recognize there are other members of the school community who have an indirect and substantial influence on student behavior; however, the scope of this study was limited to those individuals who have the most interaction with students relative to student behavior and discipline. I selected building administrators because they conduct discipline and most directly influence the climate and culture of the school (Hallinger, 2005). Building leaders are ultimately responsible for organizational procedures (Myran & Sutherland, 2018) and the safety of the school. They define expectations, reinforce practices, and provide professional learning to staff based on division policies. I selected teachers because they are the primary behavior managers with the most direct

impact on student learning and behavior for all students. Behavioral staff members, the third group, are responsible for providing intervention to students who need targeted and intensive support. As a result, those three groups have the greatest potential to impact the paradigm shift as well as the most power to derail change (Tyack, 1974).

I revisited ethical considerations throughout the study. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the purpose of the study, the process for the interview, informed consent rights, and freedom to withdraw at any time. All human subjects are over age 20 with no known mental or cognitive impairments. No identifiable information are available, therefore risks to human subjects are minimal. Any information, ideas, or statements attributed to a single individual are identified by a code only. All recorded materials will be erased after 5 years to minimize any future risks related to confidentiality. There was no assumption or expectation of transferability of the results however, that determination is available to the reader. The thick description of the context was necessary for the reader to understand the conditions of the study and determine if the results or study design are transferable to other school divisions and/or school-communities. The final analysis contains participant quotes to support the findings.

To avoid skewing the results, I recognized and acknowledged her own biases during data collection and analysis. She is an employee of the selected school division and has worked entirely in the urban school setting. I do not currently serve in an administrative or instructional capacity in a specific school building, nor do I serve as a supervisor to any of the participants. I have no direct relationship with any of the selected subjects that could represent a conflict of interest or impart bias on the research study. She had a vested interest and was committed to identifying perceptions and practices that have the potential to influence the paradigm shift and

full implementation of Virginia's *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

Virginia Board of Education's 2019 *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension* reflects significant changes in how Virginia's public schools will address student behavior. Given the proposed changes, the purpose of this case study was to identify institutionalized perceptions and practices relative to student behavior, as well as evaluate for congruence with the new paradigm. I addressed three primary research questions in the study:

- What are the institutionalized beliefs and perceptions relative to student behavior?
- Building off the above, how are educator beliefs similar to or different from current research on behavior?
- How are educator beliefs similar to or different from Virginia's 2019 *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*?

In this chapter, I discuss the data collection and findings of this study. Demographic information for the survey respondents and interview participants appears in narrative form, tables, and figures. A description and visual representation capture the analytical process relative to the data collection and analysis, including the survey, interviews, rounds of inductive and deductive coding, like and unlike group data analysis, and synthesis of the results. This chapter also includes tables and graphics to represent the themes that emerged as a result of three levels of analysis: (a) open coding, (b) categorization, and (c) theoretical coding (Christians & Carey, 1989). The process was consistent with qualitative case study methodology and yielded insights relative to the research questions.

Sample

At the time of the study, the selected school division employed 86 school administrative staff (principals and assistant principals), 12 behavioral staff (deans, behavior interventionists, and restorative counselors), and 1434 instructional staff (regular and special education teachers). The survey was sent to all 1532 staff members, in the three identified roles, via email in December 2020 with a target completion date of January 8, 2021. The survey was voluntary and 191 individuals responded, including 22 administrative staff (25.58% of administrative staff division-wide); 10 behavioral staff (83.33% of behavioral staff division-wide); and 159 instructional staff (11.09% of total instructional staff division-wide). Table 1 represents the distribution of participants in the survey. Of the 191 total respondents, 73 (38.22%) represent elementary (Kindergarten through grade 5) and 118 (61.78%) respondents represent secondary (grades 6 - 12). In addition, 117 respondents (61.25% of total respondents) serve in schools in which 55% or more of the student population is identified with socioeconomic disadvantage. The distribution of survey participants was representative of the employee demographics (limited to the selected demographic information) in the division.

Table 1

Survey Participant Demographics

Participant Characteristic	# of participants	% of total participants
School Level		
Elementary Level (K-5)	73	38.22%
Secondary Level (Grades 6 - 12)	118	61.78%
Educational Role		
Administrative Staff	22	11.52%
Behavioral Staff	10	5.24%
Instructional Staff	159	83.25%
Years of Experience		
0 - 3 years	28	14.66%
4 - 15 years	80	41.88%
16+ years	83	43.46%
School-Community Socioeconomics		
$\geq$ 55% Socioeconomic Disadvantage	117	61.25%
< 55% Socioeconomic Disadvantage	74	38.74%
Total	191	

The survey was conducted using a Google survey and responses were collected on a Google spreadsheet and time-stamped upon submission. Among the 191 respondents to the survey, 73 expressed willingness to participate in a voluntary interview. The timestamp provided an order of submission to guide the selection of interview candidates from among those willing to participate. In order of submission time, the first three individuals to volunteer within each level and role were selected as long as the following demographic criteria were met: at least one male and one female; at least one from each of the bands of experience; and at least one from a school with a student population greater than or equal to 55% socioeconomic disadvantage. The selected interview participants are representative of the demographic

distribution of the selected school division, including the following: 9 individuals from elementary (K-5) and 9 from secondary; 6 administrative staff, 6 behavioral staff, and 6 instructional staff; 11 female and 7 male. In addition, experience levels among the interviewees included 6 participants with 0 - 3 years of experience, 6 participants with 4 - 15 years of experience, and 6 participants with 16 or more years of experience. In addition, 10 participants (55.56%) serve in schools in which 55% or more of the student population is identified with socioeconomic disadvantage.

Table 2

Interview Participant Demographics

Participant Characteristic	# of participants	% of total participants
School Level		
Elementary Level (K-5)	9	50%
Secondary Level (Grades 6 - 12)	9	50%
Educational Role		
Administrative Staff	6	33.33%
Behavioral Staff	6	33.33%
Instructional Staff	6	33.33%
Gender		
Female	11	61.11%
Male	7	38.89%
Years of Experience		
0 - 3 years	6	33.33%
4 - 15 years	6	33.33%
16+ years	6	33.33%
School-Community Socioeconomics		
$\geq$ 55% Socioeconomic Disadvantage	10	55.56%
< 55% Socioeconomic Disadvantage	8	44.44%
Total	18	

Data Collection

The survey served as the initial source of data to help me compose the interview questions. I then conducted the 18 interviews in batches of three by school level and role. After the first batch of three interviews, I hand-coded the transcripts, using an inductive approach (Patton, 1980), and recorded key words in the margins. Key words reflected a variety of concepts relative to student behavior, instruction and student learning, school culture and climate, family connections, and disciplinary practices. The initial round of open coding took place concurrently with the each batch of interviews. As a new concept emerged in subsequent interviews, I reviewed the previous transcripts to evaluate if those concepts were also in the previous interview.

After the 18 interviews were complete, I examined the codes in the margins and identified up to five categories for each of the four questions. The categories then informed the development of a deductive codebook with a color-coding key. I then applied the color-coding strategy by highlighting every margin code and the corresponding information in the text with the appropriate color. Then I recorded the results into a matrix for each question and mapped them onto large sheets of newsprint so the results could be examined across levels and roles. During the final step, I synthesized the results and compared them back to the research and the principles of Virginia's *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*. Figure 1 illustrates the map of color-coded concepts and analysis for interview question two as an example.

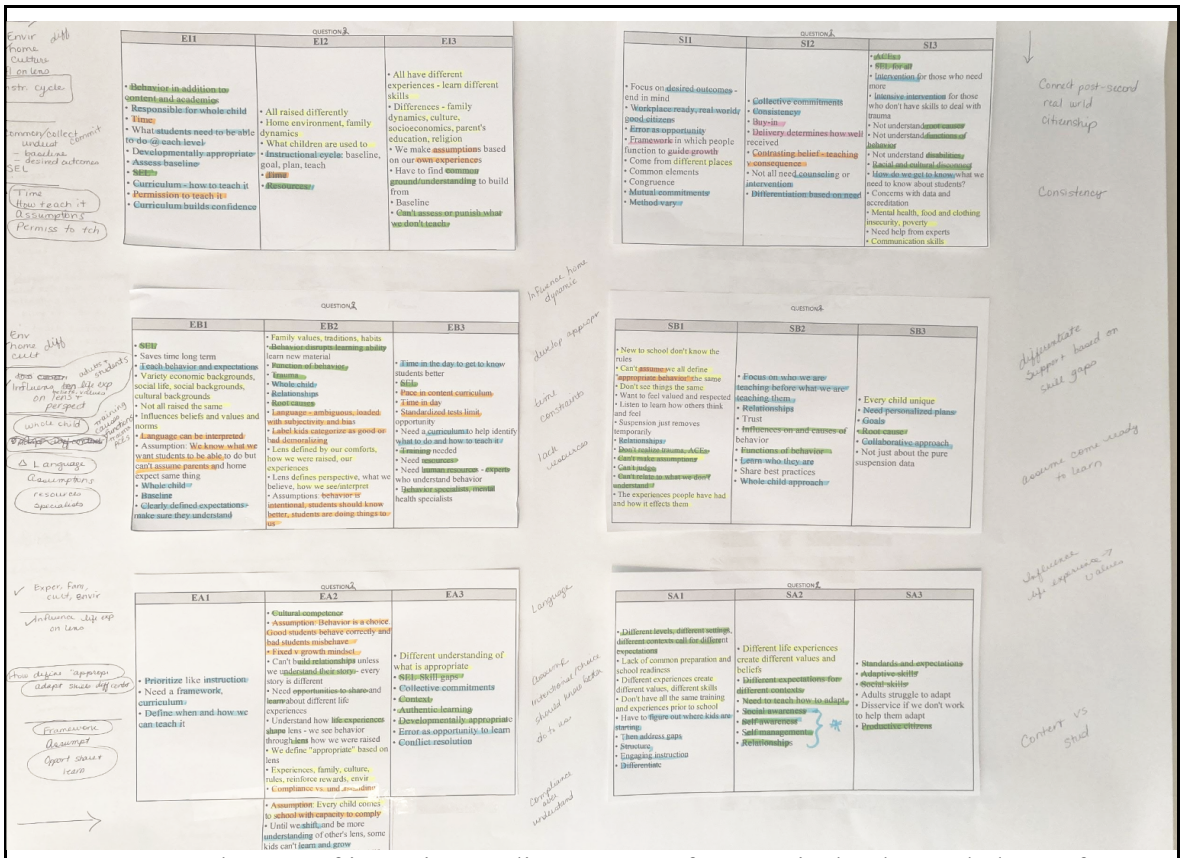

Figure 1. Sample map of interview coding. Image of categorical color-coded map for analyzing interview results from question two.

Data and Analysis

The survey results revealed several key concepts to explore through the interviews. One potential topic for further exploration dealt with beliefs and practices relative to an instructional approach to behavior. Table 3 reflects the distribution of objective responses and Figure 2 reflects the narrative responses to the survey question, *Do you believe it is the school's responsibility to teach appropriate behavior to students?* The majority of responses for all three roles and both levels indicate an affirmative response; however, the 8.9% disagreement and the narrative notes revealed potential dissonance worth further exploration. The closed-ended and open-ended narrative responses led to the first interview question:

In the survey I conducted in December in January (with administrative, behavioral, and instructional staff), I asked if participants believed schools are responsible for teaching behavior. 62.8% felt that schools are at least somewhat responsible for teaching behavior. 27.23% responded they were unsure and 8.9% disagreed completely. Given that 100% of the participants in the survey did not agree that it is the school's responsibility to teach behavior, what do you believe are the perceptual barriers and challenges that schools face in attempting to be more proactive and preventive in the approach to student behavior?

Narrative responses from the survey revealed a second pattern in recognition that students are individuals with different life experiences and perspectives. This influenced the second question:

In the survey results, I found a common theme in response to questions about the factors that contribute to challenging student behavior. They indicated that we cannot assume all children come to school with the same skills, values, and concepts of behavior. The new code of conduct challenges schools to approach behavior through an instructional prevention-based lens. If we can't assume every child comes to school with the same skills, values, and concepts of behavior, what do you think will be necessary for schools to be able to address behavior through an instructional prevention-based approach?

Table 3

Participant Agreement That Schools Should Teach Behavior

Role	Yes	Maybe	No	No Response
Administrative	77.27%	18.18%	4.54%	0%
Behavioral	80.00%	0%	4.54%	0%
Instructional	59.75%	29.56%	10.06%	0.63%
Total	62.8%	27.23%	8.9%	1.05%

YES The school's responsibilities include:

- identify, model, teach, and reinforce norms of school as they relate specifically to the learning environment
- define, model, explicitly teach, reinforce behavior with connections to real-life experiences as preparation for the real world
- collaborate with and reinforce the foundations families create
- provide a framework for understanding and learning from behavior
- recognize the word "appropriate", in reference to behavior, is subjective and context-dependent
- teach students how to adapt behavior to different settings
- connect behavior to learning as it directly impacts climate
- recognize that all children do not come to school with the same skills and understanding of behavior
- treat students as individuals and be sensitive to their unique culture, family dynamics, upbringing as those reflect differences in values and behavioral norms.
- create safe learning spaces for diverse students with diverse ranges of experience and viewpoints
- focus on behavior as it is an important part of socialization, citizenship, employability
- teach the "whole child" by setting goals and providing instruction relative to academics, socialization, communication, and behavior
- set the foundation as children are in schools more than anywhere else
- focus on social emotional competencies and well-being as they are essential to development
- a shared responsibility between the school and home

MAYBE Schools should:

- reinforce behavior but it should begin at home
- be culturally responsive and help students understand school rules without punishing students for cultural norms
- teach time and place to help students develop situational awareness and learn what is appropriate and when
- teach behavior only if it fits into the teacher's duties and not take away from the content
- not have to teach the basics such as safety in public
- teach only what we expect as acceptable behavior in the classroom
- only have to teach behavior in elementary school because students should know how to behave in middle and high school
- teach behavior but not teachers exclusively

NO Schools should not have to teach behavior because:

- it's the parent's responsibility; the basics of respect and appropriate behavior begin at home
- too much time is spent on behavior and we lose time for content instruction
- parents should teach expectations and schools should reinforce and manage behavior

Figure 2. Perceptions of school's responsibility to teach behavior. Survey respondents identified beliefs in response to the question of whether or not it is the school's responsibility to teach behavior. They provided narrative explanations for their objective responses (Yes, No, or Maybe).

The *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension* calls for schools to analyze the impact of behavior in terms of learning, operations, relationships, and safety. This underpinning is essential to the decision-making paradigm educators will use in response to student behavior. To determine existing knowledge and comfort with this concept, the survey included four questions that asked participants to identify the behaviors they believe impact specific aspects or components of the school environment. Figure 3 captures the responses relative to the question about behaviors that impede academic progress. Figure 4 captures the responses relative to the question about behaviors that impact operations. Figure 5 captures the responses relative to the question about relationship behaviors. Figure 6 captures the responses relative to the question about behaviors of a safety concern. Each figure reveals respondents identified behaviors that correctly align with the behavior indicators and categories in the model guidance; however, they also identified other behaviors not congruent with the specific category of impact, used terms intentionally excluded from the model guidance, and identified causes of behavior as actual behaviors. The range of responses to the questions about categories of impact led to the third question:

> Virginia's model, new model guidance requires schools to analyze how each behavior impacts learning operations relationships and or safety. Based on the survey results and observations, this mindset is not fully embedded into the organizational culture and norms of how schools do business relative to student behavior. What barriers and challenges do you think schools, and the school division will face in an effort to make this mindset shift?

<table>
<tr><th>Behaviors Identified that ARE Included in BAP Category</th><th>Behaviors Identified that are NOT Included in BAP Category</th><th>Terms Intentionally Excluded from VBOE Model Guidance</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">refuse to follow directions
unfocused, off task
talking out, blurting out
off topic talking
distracting others
inattention, apathy
avoidance
not participating
disengagement
failure to complete task or work
inappropriate peer interaction
dishonesty, lying
plagiarism, cheating
skipping
leaving class without permission
technology abuse
cell phone use
profanity</td><td rowspan="2">bullying
physical aggression
tantrum, meltdown
fighting
verbal aggressions
yelling
violence
dangerous behavior
weapons
drugs</td><td>defiance
insubordination
disruption</td></tr>
<tr><td>Non-Behaviors Identified as Behaviors
lack of parent support
lack of supplies
lack of social emotional skills
lack of respect for authority
lack of motivation
lack of interest
lack of self-control
lack of regulation
lack of understanding
academic frustration
lack of work ethic
lack of responsibility</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 3. Survey responses to behaviors that impede learning. Participants identified behaviors they believed will fall in the category of Behaviors that Impede Academic Progress (BAP) in the *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*. Participants identified 18 behavior descriptors that do appear in the BAP category. They identified 10 behaviors that do not fall in the BAP category, as well as 3 terms the Virginia Board of Education intentionally excluded from the model guidance. They also listed 12 items that contribute to behavior but are not behaviors.

Behaviors Identified that ARE Included in BSO Category	Behaviors Identified that are NOT Included in BSO Category	Terms Intentionally Excluded from VBOE Model Guidance
• refuse to follow directions • refuse to follow rules • failure to complete task or work • inappropriate peer interaction • dishonesty, lying • plagiarism, cheating • skipping • leaving class without permission • distraction by technology, cell phone • profanity • insulting others • loitering	• unfocused, off-task • talking out, blurting out • off-topic talking • distracting others • inattention, apathy • avoidance • not participating • disengagement • bullying • threatening • physical aggression • tantrum, meltdown • assault • fighting • verbal aggression • yelling • violence • dangerous behavior • weapons • drugs	• defiance • insubordination • disruption **Non-Behaviors Identified as Behaviors** • lack of social skills • lack of self-awareness • lack of self-regulation • lack of respect for authority • lack of family engagement • lack of motivation

Figure 4. Survey responses to behaviors that impact operations. Participants identified behaviors they believed will fall in the category of Behaviors Related to School Operations (BSO) in the *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*. Participants identified 12 behavior descriptors that do appear in the BSO category. They identified 20 behaviors that do not fall in the BSO category, as well as 3 terms the Virginia Board of Education intentionally excluded from the model guidance. They also listed 6 items that contribute to behavior but are not behaviors.

<table>
<tr><th>Behaviors Identified that ARE Included in RB Category</th><th>Behaviors Identified that are NOT Included in RB Category</th><th>Terms Intentionally Excluded from VBOE Model Guidance</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">bullying
cyberbullying
harassment
profanity
verbal insults, teasing
name-calling
gossiping
stealing</td><td rowspan="2">tardies
skipping
chronic absenteeism
disengaged in learning
inattention, apathy
not participating
giving up
not completing assignments
unwilling to interact
distraction by technology, cell phone
distracting others
uncooperative
noncompliant
walking out of class without permission
tantrum, meltdown
verbal altercation
verbal aggression
physical altercation
physical aggression
fighting
not following directions</td><td>defiance
insubordination
disruption</td></tr>
<tr><td>Non-Behaviors Identified as Behaviors
basic needs not met
mental health issues
trauma
socioeconomic disadvantage
low self-esteem
low efficacy
lack of self-awareness
lack of social awareness
lack of trust for authority
lack of responsibility
lack of accountability
lack of self-management
lack of self-control
lack of parent support or family engagement
lack of understanding school norms
academic frustration
lack of respect for others
lack of compassion
education is not valued</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 5. Survey responses to behaviors that impact relationships. Participants identified behaviors they believed will fall in the category of Relationship Behaviors (RB) in the *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*. Participants identified 8 behavior descriptors that do appear in the RB category. They identified 21 behaviors that do not fall in the RB category, as well as 3 terms the Virginia Board of Education intentionally excluded from the model guidance. They also listed 19 items that contribute to behavior but are not behaviors.

Behaviors Identified that ARE Included in BSC or BESO Category	Behaviors Identified that are NOT Included in BSC or BESO Category	Terms Intentionally Excluded from VBOE Model Guidance
• tantrum, meltdown • outburst • verbal aggression • teasing • hate speech • yelling • horseplay • threatening • bullying • harassment • cyberbullying • arguing • talking back • physical aggression • physical altercation • fighting • violence • gang activity • not following safety and health protocols • weapons • drugs • bus misconduct	• giving access to unauthorized individuals • refusing to follow directions • failure to comply • loitering • technology abuse • disrespect • leaving class without permission • skipping • tardies • talking • unfocused, distracted • destroying property • dress code	• defiance • insubordination • disorderly conduct • disruption **Non-Behaviors Identified as Behaviors** • environmental hazards • lack of respect for authority • being unsupervised • lack of parent support or family engagement • lack of self-regulation • lack of conflict resolution skills • lack of empathy • lack of consistency • lack of trust • basic needs not met • mental health issues • trauma • race relations • academic frustration • environment disrupted

Figure 6. Survey responses to behaviors that impact safety. Participants identified behaviors they believed will fall in the categories of Behaviors that Present a Safety Concern (BSC) and Behaviors that Endanger Self or Others (BESO) in the *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*. Participants identified 22 behavior descriptors that do appear in the BSC or BESO category. They identified 13 behaviors that do not fall in the RB category, as well as 3 terms the Virginia Board of Education intentionally excluded from the model guidance. They also listed 15 items that contribute to behavior but are not behaviors.

A goal of the model guidance is to increase the use of interventions and alternatives to suspension in order to reduce exclusion from learning. Figure 7 captures responses to survey questions about the purpose and impact of exclusionary practices such as suspension. The

number and variety of responses that appear incongruous with the research and model guidance indicated the need to explore this concept further. This led to the final interview question:

> Historically, prior codes of conduct and disciplinary practices emphasized a linear response between behavior and consequence. The primary function of those former codes of conduct was to define which behaviors warranted suspension, by whom, and for how long. The new model guidance requires a balance of instruction, intervention and support, as well as consequences. What kinds of structural, organizational, and operational things are going to be necessary to create balance? Where do you anticipate encountering challenges that could influence buy-in and fidelity to the new model?

Perceptions of Exclusion Congruous with Research and Model Guidance	Perceptions of Exclusion Incongruous with Research and Model Guidance
• remove student so others can learn • cool down, time out, reset behavior • time for reflection • deterrent to prevent behavior • remove safety concerns • correct behavior • remove negative behavior • reinforce rules/define what is acceptable in the school setting • address safety issues • reduce harm • respond to serious or criminal behavior • address violence • doesn't work, no positive impact	• opportunity to reset behavior • encourage appropriate behavior • hold student accountable • show that actions have consequences • show what is considered criminal in the real world • restitution for those impacted • time to get resources for a student • force parent involvement • inconvenience students • give teachers or staff a break

Figure 7. Perceptions of exclusion. Participants identified 23 beliefs about exclusionary practices such as suspension from school. Of the total, 23 were consistent with current research and 10 were not.

Interview Structure

Interviews were grouped into six batches so that each batch included three participants of the same school level and role. I scheduled the interviews so that each of the three interviews in a batch took place in close proximity (within 2 workdays of the others in the batch). After completing the first batch of three interviews, I conducted the first round of open coding. The remaining batches of interviews took place concurrently with the open coding of the prior batch. The rounds of open coding, categorization, and thematic coding were completed manually directly onto copies of the interview transcripts. The results were recorded into a matrix and mapped for analysis within and across roles and levels, as well as overall. I identified several themes that recurred across the levels and roles, Overlaying the original research questions to the theme identified beliefs that align with current research and the new model guidance, as well as beliefs and conditions that counter it. Figure 8 includes a graphic representation of the analytical process.

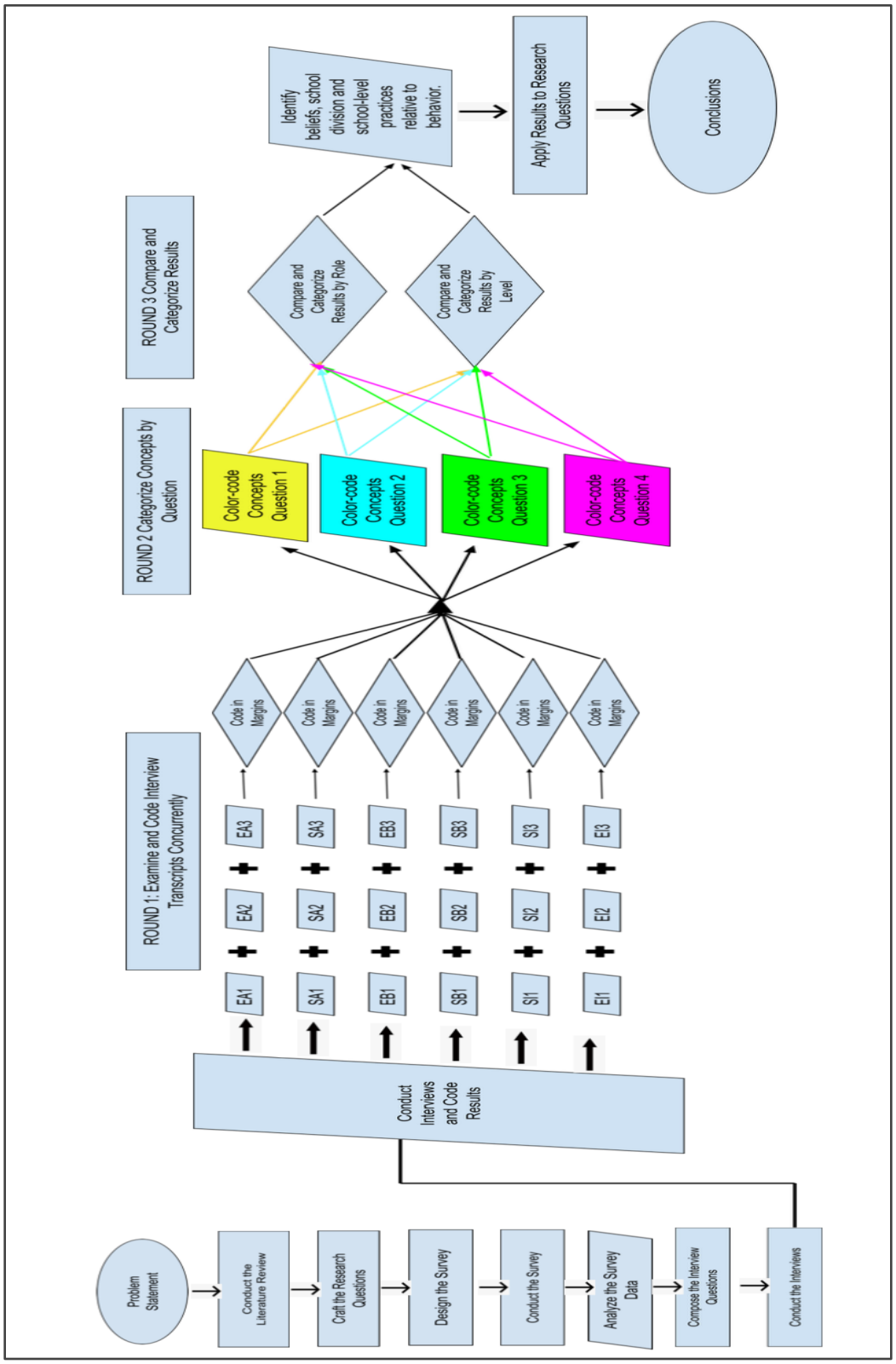

Figure 8. Analytical process for qualitative case study.

Presentation of Findings

During the analysis of survey and interview results, several themes emerged. When considered along with current research and the Virginia Board of Education's 2019 *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*, the themes reveal both potential alignment and disconnects. As organizations, schools and school divisions can anticipate some anxiety and even resistance to change. To mitigate this common phenomenon relative to change, school divisions are wise to examine and anticipate potential causes of anxiety including conflicting beliefs and/or structures that do not support the change. The adoption and implementation of the new code of conduct reflect a comprehensive paradigm shift that encompasses changes in many aspects of the organization. As anticipated, responses to the survey and interviews reflect fear of change, comfort with what is familiar, anxiety over the perception that this will add one more thing to the teacher's plate, lack of trust in new initiatives, and vulnerability to the unknown. Beyond the familiar challenges associated with change, six dominant and recurring perceptual barriers emerged from the data relative to the paradigm shift.

1. **Reframing the Purpose of Schools –** The contradictory perceptions of the purpose and mission of schools.
2. **Significance of Social-Emotional Learning –** The majority of participants reference one of the cornerstones of the model guidance, social-emotional learning (SEL), at least once during their interviews.
3. **Concept of Behavior from an Instructional Lens –** Teaching pedagogy as it applies to behavior. This theme connects the concept of behavior as part of the learning experience.

4. **Changing the Narrative Relative to Behavior –** The culture and norms of an organization often have a reciprocal relationship. Over time, the habits become ingrained into the minds of individual members of the organization and subsequently difficult to reset.
5. **Perceptions of Exclusionary Practices –** The contradictory ideas relative to the use of suspension as a response to student behavior.

Reframing the Purpose of Schools

The first theme reveals contradictory perceptions of the purpose and mission of schools. Schools were once viewed as a center of the community focused on preparing students to become productive members of the community. One administrator (EA1) defined the role of the school in terms of preparing children for the future:

> It's the school's job to provide students the knowledge and skills they will need, academically and behaviorally, to be successful citizens. Schools are the pipeline for students so they can be successful in the workplace and in life.

Another administrator (SA2) identified the opportunity schools have as micro-communities to help students learn to function and interact intellectually, behaviorally, and socially:

> Schools are public spaces created for learning but that learning has to be defined more globally. Yes, kids need the content. As a former teacher, I loved getting students excited about learning what I was teaching, but I was more excited to help them grow as individuals and as members of a learning community. We have to embrace the chance we have right now to help grow their life skills so they can navigate the world when they leave us.

The concepts of real-world preparation, employability, and citizenship appear multiple times in the interviews and reflect the significance of a balanced approach to academic, social, and interpersonal skill development.

As evidenced in the interview data, increased competition in the global arena and pressure from the accountability movement have intensified internal and external pressures to improve performance on high stakes standardized assessments. Participants were acutely aware that public schools are measured and accredited based on quantifiable indicators such as attendance, academic achievement, and on-time graduation statistics. As a result, school improvement processes encourage intensive focus on core instruction and academic intervention. Multiple participants shared concerns that increased attention to academic achievement measures in isolation produces compounding consequences including disconnection from and reduced attention to non-academic elements such as behavior, relationship-building, and character education. As a result, the focus on teaching the whole child gets lost. An administrator (EA3) defined this loss in direction and focus:

> I think one major perceptual barrier is permission to teach behavior. I think we are in an era of public education when we are so focused on achievement standards that we have forgotten we are part of a village that helps kids become decent human beings.

One teacher (EI1) shared the struggle teachers experience as they try to find a balance between teaching content and teaching children:

> You feel the pressure of being responsible for the curriculum and it's easy to lose sight of being responsible for the whole child's development. I never want to focus more on test scores than on kids' needs but the pressure is always on test scores.

A behavior specialist (SB2) also identified the importance of teaching the whole child:

> Teaching the whole child is very important so it's not just about going into the classroom and teaching content. We have to get to know who our students are and where they are coming from. That is why we are here, right?

Another behavior specialist (SB1) echoed the concern and bemoaned how political pressure pushes schools to focus on academic content to the exclusion of behavior and character development, thus contributing to existing inequities:

> I understand we need to focus on reading, writing, math, science, history, the arts. It is all important to prepare children to be able to make connections and gain new knowledge. I am not suggesting we just work on relationships and social skills, but there has to be a balance. State and federal mandates have made it difficult for school divisions to find a way to fit it all in. And who suffers? Not the students with advantage. It's our vulnerable populations that need schools to provide the balance and they continue to be left behind as we push forward.

Collectively, the interview participants were not undercutting the value and importance of the core academic curriculum. The responses did, however, reveal a concern with the lack of collective understanding relative to the organizational purpose of schools and how that aligns with the values and priorities of schools.

Schools are not the only place in which the model guidance will have an impact. Families are an important element in the lives of children and the relationship between home and school has often been a source of challenge. The debate over the purpose of schools occurs in the home arena as well. While families were not interviewed as a part of this study, their significance is referenced by the majority of respondents. One administrator (SA3) identified the potential

pushback from educators and families who have expressed commitment to the intentional divide between home and school:

> I believe that some people come from the school of thought that school is particularly for academic instruction and anything to do with socialization and behavior is for the family. I have had many conversations with parents who are frustrated that the school has no right to tell their children how to behave. We need to come to a collective understanding of how to work together and not make it just our job or theirs.

An elementary teacher (EI3) also shared the concept of a collective effort and responsibility between home and school:

> We have to teach students how to function in different environments. That shouldn't take the place of what the parents teach in the home but we have to be mutually responsible for their growth and development. Otherwise, none of what we try to accomplish will mean much.

One of the behavioral staff (SB3) recognized the challenge of defining the depth and breadth of what schools are responsible for teaching versus what they have the right to teach:

> You have different parents, different beliefs, different value systems. We have to respect that and find a way to work together so that families and schools can both serve children. It takes a village. Teachers know what we are expected to cover each year. State standards and frameworks define that clearly. But what are we expected or allowed to do about their behavioral or social emotional needs?

These results reveal the new code of conduct will impact more than student behavior policies. The data suggest the paradigm shift will stimulate discussion relative to where behavior education fits into the purpose and mission of public schools in Virginia.

Significance of Social-Emotional Learning

The majority of participants reference one of the cornerstones of the model guidance, social-emotional learning (SEL), at least once during their interviews. Multiple respondents shared optimism that the model guidance will afford schools and educators time, resources, structures, and rationale to teach SEL to meet the needs of the whole child. One teacher (E12) shared the connections among SEL, student behavior, and improved classroom management:

> Teachers need time to have conversations with students. Maybe this is the thing to get us back to teaching both academics and skills students need to be able to function appropriately. That could really help prevent some of the behaviors that take away from our ability to teach.

A behavior specialist (EB3) added to the concept by connecting emotional regulation to academic access:

> I would say it's necessary to carve out time in the instructional day to do this. We have to spend time on this or students won't be able to handle their feelings and emotions and if they can't do that they struggle with behavior. If they're not behaving, they're not learning.

One administrator (EA2) shared the potential of SEL to be a pivotal influence on how teachers address students' current and future needs:

> We need to empower teachers to be part of the change. They know their students the best and they genuinely care about them. We need to provide teachers with more than just the right to remove a child from the classroom when behavior isn't desirable. I think social-emotional learning is going to be a game changer in how we help children gain self-awareness, learn to interact with peers, develop self-regulation, and deal with anxiety. It

> will help us get to know our students better. We can't build relationships with our students unless we understand their story.

Connections to relationship building and desirable behavior were evident as participants talked about the benefits of SEL.

A comparison between elementary and secondary responses revealed differences in concerns about the integration of SEL. teachers and administrators focused on concerns with pacing and external measures of curriculum compliance. One elementary teacher (EI2) shared optimism, but tempered the enthusiasm with the recognition that existing operational challenges limit the implementation of SEL.:

> I am excited about SEL. It makes a lot of sense when you think about why some children can't handle stressful situations and they act out. My concern is when are we supposed to teach it? The pacing guides are so full and my daily schedule is so tight - every minute is accounted for. I don't know when I can focus on relationships and social emotional competencies. Not to mention will I be allowed? I don't want to get dinged on an observation because I was working with a group of students on relationship skills when I was supposed to be teaching math.

An elementary administrator (EA3) recognized the challenge of balancing what gets prioritized and measured:

> We have trained teachers to adhere to standards and follow the curriculum framework. We are going to need those to show teachers how to embed SEL into content or it probably won't happen in any SOL grades.

In contrast, secondary participants shared concerns with teacher training, resources, and how SEL, will fit into content instruction. A secondary teacher (SI3) shared the need to address SEL, but expressed concern for educator knowledge and experience:

> SEL makes a lot of sense and could really help us help our students, but I think everyone will have to go through a kind of behavioral psychology type class or a behavior boot camp. For those of us already in the classroom, we don't really understand how to teach something like social-emotional learning. We don't get exposed enough to what really makes students behave the way they do.

A secondary behavioral staff member (SB3) also shared the concern with staff knowledge:

> We have tried a lot of different things to address student behavior but when I look through the data, I don't really see any changes. I think it's because we are just responding to the behaviors and not really addressing the causes of behavior. We don't really talk about that; we just talk about different ways to respond when it happens. Social emotional skills could really help our students handle things and behave better, but this isn't something our teachers have had to focus on before. This is going to take some training - SEL, causes, functions of behavior.

These data suggest some champions embrace SEL; however, they face challenges associated with time constraints and gaps in the knowledge base necessary to implement relevant instruction in meaningful ways. Grounded in SEL, the new model guidance provides a framework for developing skills students need to function productively in the school setting. While conceptual receptivity is consistent, concerns with operational plausibility exist.

Concept of Behavior From an Instructional Lens

The call to reframe the purpose of schools and the influence of SEL leads to the third theme: instructional pedagogy as it applies to behavior. This theme connects the concept of behavior as part of the learning experience. One behavior specialist (EB1) identified the need to shift thinking to consider the causal relationship between the brain's response to stimuli and behavior:

> A lot of what causes behavior is in our brains. It comes from memories, prior life experiences, lessons, cultural traditions, family, trauma. We just see the outcomes of what is going on in the brain.

An administrator (EA2) referenced the relationship between behavior and learning and reinforced the reality that children cannot engage in metacognitive learning if social emotional and physiological needs are not met:

> Behavior has such an impact on a child's ability to learn academics that we have to think about behavior not as an external influence but in tandem with learning content. If a child is dysregulated, he can't learn new content and more than likely no one around him can either. We have to find a balance that helps kids grow.

One behavior specialist (SB2) explained that behavior can be learned through experience, observation, and direct instruction:

> If we are going to be proactive, we need to think about what we do in the classroom to model, teach, and reinforce appropriate behavior. Teaching behavior isn't the same as managing it. It has to be more than just a set of classroom rules and a pile of discipline referrals. What happens in between those two is what really matters.

The combination of these ideas reveals the potential to approach behavior not as a series of physical actions but as a blending of instinctive, emotional, and cognitive influences.

The concept of treating behavior with the same intentionality as academic instruction has both support and barriers. One idea that appeared multiple times is the potential of applying a pedagogical approach similar to that which teachers use to teach academic content. One administrator (EA1) shared the logic of applying a teaching model to the concept of behavior:

> When you think about it from an instructional lens, you know our job as educators, we are supposed to start with a baseline for kids. That baseline is really about a lot more than just literacy and numeracy. It's also about the student's readiness for learning. We need to define what positive behavior looks like for each grade level. It needs to be measurable and appropriate. Then we work backward to identify how to get students to that desired end.

Given the emphasis on not reducing time for content, respondents also identified the challenge will be to find appropriate ways to weave and embed behavior instruction into the academic context. Another administrator (SA1) reflected on the process for teaching behavior is similar to the process through which students learn skills:

> If we think of behavior like we think about skills like reading and writing, then it makes sense to use what we know about good teaching. Set developmentally appropriate goals and expectations. Model and provide differentiated learning experiences. Monitor, use constructive feedback, and provide supports for those who need it. The challenge again is finding the time in the day.

An elementary behavioral specialist (EB1) suggested integrating behavior as a part of the learning experience and not make it a separate element thus potentially alleviating the time barrier:

> We still have to teach the standards. We don't want the pendulum to swing back to the opposite extreme. We need to find a way to embed it into learning. It needs to be more seamless so it doesn't treat behavior like something extra or separate.

The charge of the model guidance is to teach and support behavior; however, the political reality and organizational culture of public education does not create the most favorable conditions for it.

The survey narratives and interview results reveal some competing conceptual assumptions about behavior. Several respondents indicated either they believe or have heard colleagues defend the following assumptions: "students should learn appropriate behavior at home"; "students should come to school ready to behave"; "students should know how to act"; and "misbehavior is a choice." These assumptions contrast with beliefs that there are many influences on behavior including family and home dynamics, cultural influences and traditions, physical and mental health, access to the basic needs, etc. The latter mindset calls attention to the inequity of the former and a lack of understanding relative to root causes and functions of behavior. One teacher (EI3) challenged that it is the school's responsibility to teach behavior if there is an expectation of holding students accountable to specific expectations, "If we don't teach it, then what right do we have to measure, evaluate or punish for it?"

Participants recognized that students are individuals with unique life experiences who cannot simply intuit the expectations of others. A behavior specialist (SB1) shared from personal

experience and professional knowledge that rules and expectations constantly change. Some students will adjust more easily than others:

> When you start in a new school or class, you don't know what the rules are. You don't know what is considered acceptable or not. You only know what existed before or what you were taught before. When kids come to school they have lived in different places or are raised in very different homes with unique family situations. They aren't going to see things the same way. They all want a safe and secure place to go to school. They want to feel valued and treated respectfully regardless where they live, how much money their parents make, what their parents do for a living, or what culture they are. Some are going to pick up on things faster than others. We have to differentiate how we work with kids. We have to meet them where they are ... we have to help them develop some common understanding about behavior.

Participants suggest that to serve children equitably, there has to be a structured and differentiated approach to supporting behavior development.

The paradigm of the new model guidance is significantly different from the model school divisions have followed for decades. Survey and interview results suggest the learning will need to extend to the educators as well. A secondary administrator (SA3) shared concerns that teachers will have a hard time adjusting to the concept of impact analysis before response determination:

> Some people are used to drawing the line and when students cross it, they write a referral. They look for students to get a specific punishment based on what has been defined regardless how severe the situation was or who it affected. Impact is definitely going to

> be a new concept but I think it's important that we all use that language so students hear the same message.

A secondary behavior specialist (SB1) shared concerns with the lack of consistency with root cause analysis:

> I know no other way to put it, but you know when a kid behaves in a certain way there's a reason for it. You can't just send them out because you don't know why. You have to take the time to figure out the why and respond to that - not just the original behavior. This is going to be a new concept for the majority of people.

Another secondary behavior specialist (SB1) shared a similar thought about the impact of understanding the root causes and functions of behavior:

> This gives us an opportunity to dig deeper into why students act out, because there is a reason. It's not about making excuses but it is about finding the cause and dealing with it. We are going to have to work really hard to help people who don't realize the baggage or background of some of their students.

These data would suggest secondary educators have deep knowledge of their content but don't always have the same depth of understanding relative to adolescent development.

There appears to be a difference for elementary educators in terms of their potential for professional growth. By nature of their educational experiences, elementary educators have more exposure and training relative to child development. An elementary administrator (EA1) shared a different focus for professional growth for elementary staff and schools:

> The majority of elementary teachers seem to be in touch with their students' feelings and can deal with the small stuff, but they don't always realize how they unintentionally trigger students. And sometimes they don't know what to do when a student gets loud or

> upset. It's not all teachers - this is going to have to be as differentiated as how we work with students.

An elementary teacher (EI2) reflected on the concept of categorizing behavior based on impact and identified a desire to learn how to use a new approach to conversations with students about behavior:

> This is a lot to digest. Right now, we just decide the rule a student violates and we give them the discipline we are allowed or we send them to the office to get their discipline. Does this mean the categories don't work the same way? I have heard teachers have had success with restorative chats to talk with students about why the behavior is a problem in terms of who it caused problems for or how. I need to learn how to do that.

This finding reveals a complex need for a variety of professional learning approaches and strategies to help all educators develop beliefs and skills cohesive with treating behavior from an instructional lens.

Changing the Narrative Relative to Behavior

The culture and norms of an organization often have a reciprocal relationship. Over time, the habits become ingrained into the minds of individual members of the organization and subsequently difficult to reset. The fourth theme that emerged from the data revealed concerns with the word choice educators have become accustomed to using as they talk about behavior. Language in Virginia's prior code of conduct included terms such as defiance, disobedience, disorderly, and disruption. These "D-codes" are vague, non-specific catchall terms school personnel became conditioned to use as they define and categorize undesirable behavior (see Figures 3 - 7). The new model guidance does not contain those terms as the expectation is for

school personnel to use more specific language to move away from the focus on compliance and toward the goal of helping students conceptualize behavior.

The responses to the survey and interviews indicate a concern with the word choice educators use relative to undesirable behavior. Language often criminalizes behavior and contributes to a negative mindset. One of the secondary teachers (SI3) identified the potential ramifications of several frequently used terms:

> Until I listened to myself just now I didn't realize how much we talk about student behaviors like they are delinquents. We use words like violation, offense, um victim. They sound like we are calling them delinquents. I wonder how that makes them feel.

One of the elementary behavior specialists (EB2) criticized the tone and connotation of current language relative to behavior:

> We have to think about the impact of our own behavior. How we talk about things is very important. A lot of the behavior terms we have grown accustomed to using are vague, loaded with subjectivity and bias. And how demoralizing is it for a child to constantly be labeled that way? It can be hard for a child to overcome emotionally.

A secondary administrator (SA1) anticipated the impact of this language on students and parents:

> I think, sometimes, the way we talk about behavior puts parents on the defensive and makes children feel bad about themselves. No wonder parents get upset when we call about their child and something they did in the classroom or the hall or the cafeteria. It sounds like we are judging them. It will take time but we need to choose our words better if we want to build better relationships.

The Virginia Board of Education recognizes the influence of loaded words and has worked to remove a level of presumption and bias. Participant responses indicate that element of school culture is not aligned to the shift and presents an opportunity for growth.

Perceptions of Exclusionary Practices

The final theme reveals beliefs about exclusionary practice. Figure 7 reveals the contradictory ideas relative to the use of suspension as a response to student behavior. Multiple respondents indicated that schools are accustomed to assigning suspensions in response to negative behavior despite the absence of value. An administrator (SA3) called attention to the need to consider the repercussions of suspension:

> I don't think people realize what even a one-day suspension could mean for a student's future. Just like we are going to have to think in terms of the impact of a child's behavior, we need to think about the impact of our responses to their behavior. Sometimes suspension is appropriate - when there are safety issues. But most of the time we are using it because that's what we have always done.

An elementary teacher (EI3) acknowledged interaction with students and root cause analysis are more time consuming than suspension, however those practices are more effective for students:

> Suspension is easier than having a conversation or trying to figure out what caused the behavior or what to do about what caused it. That's probably why it has been the way we have dealt with behavior for so long. But it isn't productive and it doesn't teach students anything.

A secondary teacher (SI3) recognized the cycle suspension creates without positive outcomes for the student:

> The old way leads to repeat behaviors. The student gets kicked out, misses instruction, doesn't get help, and comes back to do the same things because they didn't learn anything or the cause of the behavior wasn't addressed.

Another secondary teacher (SI1) suggested reasons why suspension was the dominant punishment choice for schools but recommended more limited use:

> I don't think suspension should be the first option for lots of reasons. It used to be an efficient tool because it removed the student and forced parents to get involved but I think times have changed and we need to change. We need to get parents involved before there are concerns not as part of a punishment. I think in many cases suspension just seemed easy because it gave people a break from each other. It got easier and easier to suspend kids. At some point it became our go-to action. Punishments have become so harsh and arbitrary that they are disconnected from the original behavior and don't change anything. Suspension really needs to be reserved for the worst situations.

Another secondary teacher (SI2) recognized the influence of external variables, root causes, and antecedents:

> We have to examine things case by case. We need to think about the whole situation like what may have contributed to the behavior. What if a child is acting out because his mother is being abused at home or she is hungry because her mother lost her job? We have to stop looking just at the behavior and consider that it might be a sign that other things are happening. And we can look at it as an opportunity for the child to learn and grow.

One participant (SB1) captured the heart of the debate in terms of serving all students, "We can't continue with business as usual because no students are expendable."

Summary

As research shows, it is often difficult to find balance in public education. While there is evidence to support new initiatives and changes in policy and practice, counter-information and competing interests often push back. Counter-pressure within and external to the organizations can push schools to fall back to the status quo. The challenge with the shift to Virginia's 2019 *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension* is that it calls for a complete paradigm shift and not just an operational or technical change. Conduct practices frequently meet with emotional responses from students and parents, teachers, administrators, and community members. This study was designed to identify existing beliefs and practices among school staff relative to student behavior. The results will be used to anticipate potential challenges in the implementation of the model guidance to inform planning for communication, professional development, administrative protocols, and policy changes.

As the purpose of the study was to evaluate perceptions and practices in a single school division, case study served as the appropriate methodology. The focus of the study was on educator beliefs and practices, therefore school administrators, behavioral staff, and teachers served as the participant population. While all employees in those three role categories received an invitation to participate voluntarily, the survey included responses from 191 participants. The interview data were collected from 18 participants. Three research questions guided the study.

- What are the institutionalized beliefs and perceptions relative to student behavior?
- Building off the above, how are educator beliefs similar to or different from current research on behavior?
- How are educator beliefs similar to or different from Virginia's 2019 *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension*?

Participants were able to identify both their own beliefs but also potential challenges based on their observations and experiences. I scrutinized the data using rounds of inductive and then deductive coding and analysis to examine for patterns and themes.

Through an iterative process, the data revealed several recurring themes about staff beliefs and practices relative to student behavior. The interviews focused on the context of the change to Virginia's 2019 *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension* allowed participants to reveal both support for the change, as well as concerns over existing beliefs and practices that are not congruous with the new paradigm. Themes include: reframing the purpose of schools; the significance of social-emotional learning; the concept of behavior from an instructional lens; the narrative related to behavior; and perceptions of exclusionary practices. The themes prompt thinking about how the school division can develop appropriate systems, resources, and interactional professional learning experiences to address the identified perceptual and operational barriers.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to demystify beliefs and practices in a single school division relative to student behavior. The intent was to examine the relationship between educators' ideas and behaviors, current research, and Virginia's 2019 *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension.* The model guidance defines significant changes in policy relative to student conduct and as such it poses a comprehensive paradigm shift in practice from how public schools in Virginia have been addressing behavior. The former code of conduct, established in 1994, is the only official code of conduct with which current staff have been working. While many staff members support the shift, the concern is this shift will require comprehensive changes in mindset before there can be an expectation of change in action. The goal of the study was to identify potential support and resistance to the paradigm shift.

Summary of the Study

As defined in Chapter 3, the process unfolded in a structured way guided by the framework of an iterative process. Beginning with an open-ended survey, I captured data relative to perceptions, understanding, and concerns about student behavior and division policies. The 191 participants responded via a Google survey and the results populated directly to a Google spreadsheet. The survey results revealed contrasting perceptions and potential challenges as the school division prepares to move forward with the change. Informally the survey also identified that despite efforts to make division personnel aware of the changes, some individuals expressed

being unaware of the change. While not surprising, it was important to have that additional information to define the baseline for staff understanding and comfort.

The context of the study was unique as a result of timing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The school division had very few students return to in-person learning before completion of the study; therefore staff were working almost entirely through a virtual platform. One potential disadvantage was that many school-level employees have shared how much time has been consumed in planning, delivering, and working with students and staff in the virtual context. As a result, additional tasks such as voluntary surveys may not be a priority for time. Total participation included 191 respondents to the survey, which represents 12% of the total subject pool, and the distribution was representative of the division employees with the selected roles (administrative, behavioral, and instructional).

Analysis of the survey results informed the development of four questions that I posed to each of 18 participants in individual interviews. Interviews took place virtually as a pandemic mitigation strategy. This created a less than ideal setting however, each participant and I could see and hear one another via the computer screen and conversations were authentic. Given employees had been using Zoom for over eight months at the time of the interviews, both the participants and I appeared comfortable using the technology. The online translation software enabled me to listen intently, as well as record memos to capture thoughts and ideas stimulated by the interviewees' responses. I examined and analyzed the interview results through an iterative process including several rounds of inductive and deductive coding. While the data revealed a variety of concepts worth exploration, five themes emerged to guide the next steps.

Summary of the Results

Each of the five themes reflects contrasting beliefs which reveal potential challenges and opportunities as the division prepares to shift to the new code of conduct. The first theme, reframing the purpose of schools, offers the potential for the school division to revisit how schools are viewed, internally and externally, relative to the mission and vision. A clear charge from the Department of Education is that schools should provide quality instruction relative to specific academic expectations. The study revealed competing philosophies regarding the latitude and limits of the authority and responsibility to develop skills beyond the academic curriculum including behavior. Educators, students, parents, and communities have been influenced by the standards and accountability movements for the past two decades. The model guidance challenges school divisions to reframe the purpose of schools as institutions of learning, social development, and personal growth for all children.

The second theme, the significance of social-emotional learning (SEL), resonated among the majority of participant responses with no specific prompting. This reflects the division's efforts over the past three years to increase understanding and implement related practices. While the majority of participants responded in favor of SEL as a concept, there were varying levels of concern relative to a lack of time in the instructional day, resources to inform delivery, a framework for integrating the instruction, and permission to teach something not directly in the state framework. At the division level, this identifies the need for clarification on instructional time as well as training needs.

An additional opportunity for training aligns with the third theme: the concept of behavior from an instructional lens. Current teacher observation and evaluation models align with research-based best practices relative to instructional design and delivery. Data from the

study indicated comfort with the logic of also applying the learning cycle to behavior. Participants identified potential knowledge and skill gaps to make that process effective. Research suggests school staff need to be stewards of growth rather than disseminators of content knowledge. To address behavior more proactively and equitably, educators will need to understand the content relative to behavior including root causes, functions of behavior, and the impact of behavior.

A fourth theme emerged relative to language habits that impact the interactions and relationships among students, teachers, and school administrators. Prior codes of conduct have influenced the language educators use in referencing undesirable behaviors. Specific terms carry negative connotations that tend to criminalize student behavior. As the school division works to embrace a more proactive and positive climate relative to behavior, in alignment with both current research and the model guidance, educators will need to participate in professional dialogue and conversations to create a collective understanding of how word choice impacts adult beliefs and student perceptions.

The first four themes reveal shifts in mindset and practice, as well as growth opportunities. The fifth theme - perceptions of exclusion - connects back to the other four and calls attention to attitudes deeply rooted in the traditional sanctions-based conduct practices. Understanding of the purpose and impact of suspension ranges dramatically. Some individuals believe suspension increases accountability; however, current research does not support that as a benefit. There is some understanding of the long-term consequences of suspension on an individual student's academic, social, and emotional growth. The two most significant opportunities for the school division relative to this theme include: (1) focus on communication and professional learning to increase awareness and understanding of what the research says, and

(2) reset structures to provide a clear continuum of interventions and responses including increased alternatives to suspension.

Discussion

Change in organizations often produces opportunities, as well as challenges. The history of public education in the United States includes a variety of changes. Some changes resulted from improvements in technology, resources, and understanding about human development and learning - while others were responses to social and political movements. A significant pending change to impact Virginia's public schools is the implementation of Virginia's *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension (2019)*. This change represents more than technical or operational changes - it represents a comprehensive paradigm shift. As participants in this study revealed, a successful transition will rely on the school division's ability to anticipate and mitigate limitations related to perceptual barriers and existing mechanisms. From an organizational perspective, a recurring implication emerged across the findings that points to a disconnect between the structure of public education and the ability of educators to achieve their intended mission.

The survey and interview data reveal five themes educators can use to drive planning for the shift relative to the new paradigm. The first theme, reframing the purpose of schools, identifies an opportunity to revisit the mission and vision of public education. Participants suggested the outcome should reflect a whole-child conceptualized approach. The second theme, the significance of social-emotional learning, aligns with the first in terms of educating students both intellectually and socially - academically and behaviorally. Social-emotional learning creates the intellectual space for adult and student growth. According to current research, social emotional competencies can have a significant influence on how individuals manage and respond

to stress and stimuli. Participants identified the need for training and structures relative to social-emotional learning to help students acquire developmentally appropriate skills. These first two themes reveal educator interest in resetting how schools empower children to behave productively.

The other three themes relate to a shift in habits and perceptions. The third theme, the concept of behavior from an instructional lens, reveals a disconnect between academics and behavior as if they are separate and independent entities. Research reveals academics and social behavior share a corollary relationship such that improvement in one often occurs simultaneously with improvement in the other (Algozzine, Wang & Violette, 2011). Traditional structures focus heavily on content delivery in contrast to the mission of developing the whole child. Participants suggested this produces competing interests within the organization and can work against change. The fourth theme, changing the narrative relative to behavior, illustrates how word choice reflects attitudes and influences outcomes. Participants called attention to phrases and terms that contribute negatively to perceptions about student behavior and contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy for some students. The fifth theme, perceptions of exclusionary practices, reveal misguided faith in, and a lack of understanding relative to the consequences of suspension. All three themes present opportunities for professional learning to prepare educators cognitively for the change in the code of conduct.

It is important to acknowledge that mindset and operational barriers have to be addressed or an organization cannot mitigate challenges related to change. If the change to the new code of conduct only occurs at the surface level with adjustments to the behavior descriptors and state codes, without a deeper understanding of the purpose for the shift, then individuals will likely maintain their current beliefs and find a way to maintain similar practices. Organizational

structures rooted in a hierarchical structure reminiscent of neo managerialism tend to encourage and reward focus on accountability and efficiency (Au, 2011; Hall, 2005; Taylor, 1911). Compliance with superficial changes, however, will not yield the desired outcomes. The intent of a more proactive, preventative, and equitable approach to student behavior can only be realized through a comprehensive paradigm shift that disrupts existing organizational norms (Morgan, 2006). As adult beliefs and perceptions expand, adult behavior changes, structure and operational systems change, habits, mannerisms, norms of the organization change, and ultimately student behavior improves.

Although Virginia's *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension* passed in 2019, full implementation is projected for the 2021-22 school year. This study is a timely addition to the body of knowledge relative to student behavior because it addresses existing beliefs and practices deeply rooted in the current and historical contexts, as well as potential implications to the paradigm shift. While conducting the literature review, I expected the study to highlight some of the identified challenges related to change, as well as requests for more staff to address serious behavioral and mental health needs. Participants revealed some understanding of concepts aligned to the research and the model guidance however, there are evident gaps in understanding. Those present an opportunity for professional learning experiences. I did not, however, anticipate the level of anxiety expressed relative to curriculum constraints or permission to teach social-emotional learning. For the division to disrupt the current cycle, there will need to be some organizational changes relative to curriculum and instruction. One resounding conclusion from the data is that mindset has to shift before practice will change.

Recommendations for Future Research

While I used this study to explore substantively the administrative, behavioral, and instructional staff beliefs relative to student behavior, there are additional members of the school community who have a significant impact on student learning and behavior. The impact of school counselors and support staff appeared multiple times in the interview responses. An opportunity for further exploration is to conduct the study again and solicit input from school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists. It would be interesting to compare the responses from the original study to responses from these individuals whose expertise and primary objective address the mental and emotional health of students.

Another agent who has a significant influence on student behavior, but was not considered in this study, is the parent or guardian. It could be interesting to solicit parent beliefs, especially relative to reframing the purpose of schools. Responses in this study revealed the absence of agreement as to whether or not schools should teach behavior. Participants referenced the impact and responsibility parents have relative to student behavior. They also recognized the potential impact of home dynamics, upbringing, cultural norms, socioeconomics, and language on student values. Parent beliefs could offer insight into additional potential challenges relative to the implementation of the code of conduct, as well as opportunities for a way forward.

One additional participant opportunity is to conduct the study with students as participants to solicit their perceptions directly. The current study explores the perceptions relative to external influences; however, it lacks evidence of appreciation for the reciprocal nature of learning and social interactions between students and educators. Conducting the study with students as participants will create the opportunity to examine students as active agents of their own learning - academic and behavioral.

One of the significant motivations for the new model guidance is to address the inequities that significantly disadvantage minority students. Race was not a demographic indicator in the survey; therefore, the results could not be disaggregated by ethnicity. Interview participants included both Black and White participants however, their results were not categorized or examined with reference to race. Given documented evidence of disproportionate use of suspension for Black students, the perception of current practices with minority students is an area worth reflection and exploration. This could produce valuable insights for consideration relative to cultural responsiveness.

There was never an assumption or objective for the results of this single school division case study to be generalizable across other school divisions in the state. The results are limited to the perspectives of a representative sample of individuals from among three roles in a single organization. The context of the case study is a single, mid-sized, urban division with significant cultural diversity and history. What may be transferable to other divisions is the possibility of replicating the process to evaluate their staff beliefs and readiness for the shift. The examination could include comparison of urban to rural school divisions, and/or comparison by the size of the division. As data are collected from a wider range of school divisions, they may increase the generalizability and transference of the findings.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Disruption of institutionalized norms requires changes at all levels of an organization. This study reveals the need for district leaders to examine how changes in curriculum, including time allocation, could provide a space for teaching behavior and integrate social-emotional learning into core instruction. Also at the district level, focus groups with stakeholders from within the organization and the external community could revisit the mission and vision to

discuss the purpose of schools. Those groups could then problem-solve to identify opportunities to increase that message across the community.

At the state level, the model guidance has created momentum for positive change; however, schools need the support and direction to make the change a reality. This includes the need for standards, a curriculum framework, and recommendations relative to instructional time for social-emotional learning. The study suggests the Department of Education is responsible for communicating adjusted expectations across the instructional departments so that the message is not just from the Student Services department. Those elements are necessary to support school divisions with a disruptive innovation that will help schools fully embrace the paradigm shift to a more proactive, preventive, and equitable approach to student behavior.

In the world of higher education, there is potential for a shift in educator and school leader education and training relative to student behavior and student management. Those who are likely to have the most direct impact on student behavior are those who work directly with students in the schools. The shift is likely to gain momentum as incoming school personnel and administrators explore and develop understanding of student behavior consistent with the model guidance and current research. This suggests the opportunity and need for post-graduate education and leadership training to reflect current knowledge and practices aligned to the new paradigm. Increased research, knowledge, and learning will inform and influence change in belief.

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APPENDIX A

CATEGORY BAP: Behaviors that Impede Academic Progress *These behaviors impede academic progress of the student or students. They are typically indicative of the student's lack of self-management or self-awareness. Sometimes, the student may need help in understanding how the behavior impacts others so training in social awareness may also be indicated.*
Interfering with learning in the classroom *(examples include talking, excessive noise, off-task, out of seat, possessing items that distract)*
Interfering with learning outside of the classroom *(examples include excessive noise, interrupting a class)*
Scholastic dishonesty *(cheating, plagiarism, forgery (including computer forgery), lying, stealing, or any other acts of dishonesty)*
Unexcused tardiness to class
Unexcused tardiness to school

CATEGORY BSO: Behaviors Related to School Operations *These behaviors interfere with the daily operation of school procedures. Students exhibiting these behaviors may need to develop self-management, self-awareness, or social awareness skills.*
Altering an official document or record
Giving false information, misrepresentation *(e.g., intentional or repeated cheating, plagiarism, lying)*
Refusal to comply with requests of staff in a way that interferes with the operation of the school
Failure to be in one's assigned place *(this includes missing or skipping a class or activity with no justifiable reason, as well as leaving class prior to the time of dismissal without permission of the teacher)*
Failure to attend assigned disciplinary setting *(detention, in-school suspension, Saturday school, Alternatives to Suspension)*

Bringing unauthorized persons to school or allowing unauthorized persons to enter the school building
Dress Code Violation
Gambling *(including games of chance for money or profit as defined in § 18.2-46.1. Possession of gambling devices and paraphernalia is prohibited.)*
Possessing items that are inappropriate for school *(examples include toys, literature, electronics)*
Possession of stolen items
Unauthorized use of school electronic or other equipment
Violation of the Acceptable Use of Technology/internet policy
Violation of school board policy regarding the possession or use of portable communication devices
Vandalism, graffiti, or other damage to school or personal property *(Thoughtless defacement, damage, or destruction and willful or malicious acts of damage or destruction of public/school property)*

CATEGORY RB: Relationship Behaviors
These behaviors create a negative relationship between two or more people that does not result in physical harm. Relationship behaviors affect the whole school community in that the school climate is often a reflection of how people treat one another. Students who exhibit difficulty with relationship behaviors may also have difficulty with the other social-emotional competencies.
Bullying with no physical injury
Cyberbullying
Posting, distributing, displaying, or sharing inappropriate material or literature, including using electronics means
Saying or writing either directly or through electronic communication sexually suggestive comments, innuendos, propositions, or other remarks of a sexual nature

Stealing money or property without physical force
Speaking to another in an uncivil, discourteous manner
Teasing, taunting, engaging in a verbal confrontation, verbally inciting a fight
Using profane or vulgar language or gestures *(swearing, cursing, hate speech, gang signs or gestures)*
Using slurs based upon the actual or perceived race, ethnicity, color, national origin, citizenship/immigration status, weight, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, or disability
Failure to respond to questions or requests by staff
Unwanted or inappropriate physical contact of a sexual nature

CATEGORY BSC: Behaviors that Present a Safety Concern *These behaviors create unsafe conditions for students, staff, and visitors to the school. The underlying reasons for this type of behavior may lie in any of the social-emotional competencies so the administrator should investigate the underlying motivation for the student's behavior. Training in social awareness and decision-making is usually indicated in any behavior that creates a safety concern.*
Alcohol: Possessing or using alcohol
Alcohol: Distributing alcohol to other students
Drugs: Possessing drug paraphernalia
Drugs: Violating school board non-prescription (over the counter) medication policy or look-alike drug policy
Tobacco: Possessing/Using/Distributing tobacco products, possessing tobacco paraphernalia, electronic cigarettes, vaping equipment
Bullying Behavior without physical injury that continues after intervention *(Bullying that leads to physical injury will be classified as Assault and Battery.)*

Cyberbullying that continues after intervention (*Cyberbullying that relates a threat to the safety of students and staff should be treated with a higher level of intervention and consequences.)*
Harassment *(Repeatedly annoying or attacking a student or a group of students or personnel creating an intimidating or hostile educational or work environment)*
Bus: Distracting the bus driver
Bus: Endangering the safety of others on the bus *(Serious or repeated incidents of bus misconduct will result in denying the student the privilege of riding on the bus.)*
Fire alarm: Falsely activating a fire or other disaster alarm
Fire related: Possessing items that could be used to set or cause a fire or produce large amounts of smoke
Engaging in reckless behavior that creates a risk of injury to self or others (including reckless use of a vehicle on school property)
Fighting that results in no injury as determined by school administration
Inciting or causing a substantial disturbance to the operation of school or the safety of staff and/or students
Throwing an object that has the potential to cause a disturbance, injury, or property damage
Shoving, pushing, striking, biting another student with no visible injury
Exposing body parts, lewd or indecent public behavior
Physical contact of a sexual nature – patting body parts, pinching, tugging clothing
Physical sexual aggression and/or forcing another to engage in sexual activity; Sexual assault
Stalking
Stealing money or property using physical force (no weapon involved)
Stealing/attempting to steal money or property using weapons or dangerous instruments

Leaving school grounds without permission
Trespassing
Possessing dangerous instruments/substances that could be used to inflict harm upon another
Weapons: Possessing any weapon (other than a firearm)

CATEGORY BESO: Behaviors that Endanger Self or Others *These behaviors endanger the health, safety, or welfare of either the student or others in the school community. Behaviors that rise to this level of severity are often complex. While they are indicative of poor decision-making skills, students who exhibit these behaviors may also have developmental needs in the other social-emotional competencies.*
Assault: Intending to cause physical injury to another person
Assault and Battery: Causing physical injury to another person
Fighting: The use of physical violence between students or on another person where there is minor injury as determined by the school administration
Striking Staff: The use of force against a staff member when no injury is caused
Drugs: Possessing controlled substances, illegal drugs, inhalants, synthetic hallucinogens, or unauthorized prescription medications
Drugs: Being under the influence of controlled substances, illegal drugs, inhalants, synthetic hallucinogens, or unauthorized prescription medications
Drugs: Using controlled substances or using illegal drugs or synthetic hallucinogens or unauthorized prescription medications
Drugs: Distributing controlled substances or prescription medications or illegal drugs or synthetic hallucinogens or alcohol to other student(s)
Fire: Attempting to set, aiding in setting, or setting a fire

Gang-Related Behavior *(Engaging in threatening or dangerous behavior that is gang-related)*
Hazing
Threatening, intimidating, or instigating violence, injury, or harm to a staff member or members
Threatening, intimidating, or instigating violence, injury, or harm to another student(s) or other(s)
Possession of a firearm or destructive device (*as defined in the Code of Virginia § 22.1-277.07)*
Using a weapon to threaten or attempt to injure school personnel
Using a weapon to threaten or attempt to injure student or other(s)
Bomb threat –Making a bomb threat

APPENDIX B

Student Behavior and Discipline Paradigm Survey

Dear teachers, school administrators, and behavior intervention staff,

This survey will help guide discussions, training, and procedures as we implement the new Code of Student Conduct.

This survey will also inform a qualitative exploratory case study analysis of educator perceptions toward student behavior and school discipline in public schools in Virginia. It examines the beliefs teachers, behavioral staff, and school leaders hold relative to why children behave as they do and how behavior concerns should be addressed.

You were identified as a prospective participant based on your current position as an instructional, administrative, or behavioral staff member in Hampton City Schools.

Your answers to this open-ended survey will help guide the development of interview questions that will further explore the institutional perceptions, beliefs, mechanisms, and practices relative to student behavior.

The survey should take approximately 10 minutes. The survey will not collect email addresses or any identifying information. All responses are confidential and no identifying information will be revealed in the final report. Only authorized users will have access to results.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please understand it is voluntary and you are able to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. You also have the right to not answer any question for any reason.

If you decide to participate, please complete and submit this survey by January 8, 2021.

The survey has been approved for distribution by the ODU Institutional Review Board and the Hampton City Schools Research Committee. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me:

In what school level are you serving for the 2020-2021 SY? *

- Elementary School
- PreK-8 School
- Middle School
- High School
- None of the above.

With what grade levels do you have the most experience relative to student behavior? *

- Grades K-5
- Grades 6-12

Does your school/center serve a specific population (e.g., gifted center, magnet program, fundamental school)? *

- Yes
- No

Does your school serve as a center for a specialized population or specific purpose (e.g., gifted center, alternative program)? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

Does your school qualify for Title I funds? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

What is your role during the 2020-2021 SY? *

- ○ Administrative staff (principal, assistant principal)
- ○ Instructional staff (classroom teacher, special education teacher, academic interventionist)
- ○ Behavioral staff (behavior interventionist, restorative justice counselor, climate coach, dean)
- ○ None of the above

Do you believe it is the school's responsibility to teach appropriate behavior to students? *

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Maybe
- ○ No opinion

Please provide a brief explanation or information to clarify your response to the previous question. *

Short answer text

What do you believe are the most frequent or common student behavior concerns that impact your work (within the in-person and/or virtual learning context)? (Please answer in list form.) *

Short answer text

What do you believe are the most significant student behavior concerns that directly impact teaching and learning (within the in-person and/or virtual learning context)? (Please answer in list form.) *

Short answer text

What do you believe are the most significant student behavior concerns that directly impact school operations (within the in-person and/or virtual learning context)? (Please answer in list form.) *

Short answer text

What do you believe are the most significant student behavior concerns that directly impact relationships (within the in-person and/or virtual learning context)? (Please answer in list form.) *

Short answer text

What do you believe are the most significant student behavior concerns that directly impact safety (within the in-person and/or virtual learning context)? (Please answer in list form.) *

Short answer text

What do you believe cause(s) or contribute(s) to undesireable student behavior? *

Short answer text

What processes do schools use to respond to undesireable student behavior? *

Short answer text

What school mechanisms or practices do you believe negatively impact or influence student behavior? *

Short answer text

What school mechanisms or practices do you believe affect improvement and/or contribute to/promote desirable student behavior? *

Short answer text

What do you believe are the school and/or community barriers to healthy social emotional and academic development for students? (Please list.) *

Short answer text

What do you believe is/are the purpose(s) of disciplinary consequences? *

Short answer text

What do you believe is/are the purpose(s) of suspension? *

Short answer text

What additional actions do you believe schools should take to address student behavior? *

Short answer text

What do you believe school staff prioritize when they respond to undesireable or challenging student behavior? *

Short answer text

What personal, academic, and professional experiences or training do you believe contribute to individual beliefs and perceptions of student behavior? *

Short answer text

How many years of experience do you have in public education? *

- 0-3
- 4 - 15
- 16+

How many years of experience do you have in your current role? *

- 0-3
- 4 - 15
- 16+

Are you aware that Virginia has adopted a new Code of Conduct and HCS practices relative to student behavior are changing? *

- Yes, and I understand the changes
- Yes, but I don't know the specific details
- Yes, a little
- No, not really
- No, not at all
- Other...

If you are willing to participate in a virtual interview about student behavior and school practices, please provide your name, email, and phone number. If you are not willing to participate in an interview, please indicate "No." This information will be kept separate from responses to all other items on the survey. *

Short answer text

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE:
Institutionalized Perceptions of Student Behavior and the Student Code of Conduct Paradigm Shift in Virginia's Public Schools

INTRODUCTION:
The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES.

RESEARCHERS

Principal Investigator:	Dr. Steve Myran, Associate Professor, Darden College of Education, Educational Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
Investigator:	Tiffany Hardy, Doctoral Candidate, Darden College of Education, Educational Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY
Until 2019, the Virginia code of conduct for student discipline was a sanction-based bureaucratic mechanism to maintain order and compliance in public schools. The new Virginia *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension (2019)* reflects a paradigm shift in how school staff will need to think about and respond to student behavior. Virginia's guidelines call for systemic changes in adult behavior. Little research exists to reveal current educator perceptions toward student behavior and school discipline in urban public school divisions in Virginia. Recognition and understanding of the variables that influence behavior will be essential to the implementation and sustainability of a balanced framework for student behavior. If you decide to participate, then you will join a case study involving research of attitudes and assumptions toward student behavior. Data collection will occur through a survey and interviews.

Participation will last for 1 hour via Zoom (https://zoom.us). Approximately 18 educators (6 teachers, 6 behavior intervention staff, and 6 school administrators) will participate in this study.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA
To the best of your knowledge, you have no exclusionary criteria that would keep you from participating in this study.

RISKS
RISKS: If you decide to participate in this study, then you may face a risk of discomfort participating in a 1-hour Zoom meeting. The researcher tried to reduce these risks by allowing participants to take breaks and move around as needed. And, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS
The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

NEW INFORMATION
If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The researchers will take reasonable steps to keep private information, such as survey results and interview responses confidential. The researcher will remove identifiers from all identifiable private information collected. The researchers will destroy all digital interview recordings after they have been transcribed. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you. Of

course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm, injury, or illness arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact the following individuals:

Dr. Steve Myran, Associate Professor
Darden College of Education, Educational Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
Email: smyran@odu.edu Phone: (757) 683-5163

Tiffany Hardy, Doctoral Candidate,
Darden College of Education, Educational Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
Email: tsanz001@odu.edu Phone: (757) 320-6758

Dr. Laura Chezan, IRB Chair, DCEPS
Email: lchezan@odu.edu Phone: (757) 683-7055

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you have about the research. If you have any questions later, then the researchers should be able to answer them.

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should contact Dr. Laura Chezan, IRB Chair, DCEPS Email: lchezan@odu.edu or Phone: (757) 683-7055.

By signing below, you are telling the researcher YES you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's Printed Name & Signature	**Date**

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Tiffany D. Hardy **Investigator's Printed Name & Signature**	#/#/2021 **Date**

APPENDIX D

Good morning/afternoon:

Thank you for being willing to participate in this study. I decided to choose this topic for my dissertation research because of my current position and the state mandate to shift to a new code of conduct based on the *Model Guidance for Positive and Preventive Code of Student Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension* passed in 2019. My study includes the survey you completed in December or January and a series of 18 interviews with practicing educators. The results will inform my dissertation but more importantly, it will help us to establish a new baseline for planning professional learning and resources necessary to make the paradigm shift.

The survey I conducted revealed a variety of perceptions and beliefs relative to student behavior. Your input in this survey is going to help the school division to refine an understanding of the relationships among institutionalized beliefs, school division mechanisms and practices, the current research on child and adolescent behavior and Virginia's 2019 *Model Guidance.*

Q: *Have you read the Informed Consent Form that you signed?*

Q: I am using an audio transcription software program called *otter.ai* to transcribe the results as we talk. That will allow me to actively listen to your responses. *Do I have your permission to use the audio transcription program?*

Q: *Do you understand that you can discontinue participation at any time?*

Q: Throughout my final analysis, any responses attributed to you will be provided a code in reference to your level, role, and order in the interview process. *Do you understand that no identifiable information will be connected with your responses?*

Q: *Are you willing to participate?*

Q: *In what level do you spend the majority of your professional time - Elementary (K - 5) or Secondary (6 - 12)?*

Q: *What is your role at your school?*

Q: In the survey I conducted in December in January (with administrative, behavioral, and instructional staff), I asked if participants believed schools are responsible for teaching

behavior. 62.8% of the participants felt that schools are at least somewhat responsible for teaching behavior. 27.23% responded they were unsure and 8.9% disagreed completely.

- *Given that 100% of the participants in the survey did not agree that it is the school's responsibility to teach behavior, what do you believe are the perceptual barriers and challenges that schools face in attempting to be more proactive and preventive in the approach to student behavior?*

Q: In the survey results, I found a common theme in response to questions about the factors that contribute to student behavior or challenges with behavior. They indicated that we can't assume all children come to school with the same skills, values, and concepts of behavior. The new code of conduct challenges schools to approach behavior through an instructional prevention-based lens.

- *If we can't assume that every child comes to us with the same skills, values, and concepts of behavior, what do you think is going to be necessary for schools to be able to address behavior through an instructional prevention-based approach or lens?*

Q: Virginia's model, new model guidance requires schools to analyze how each behavior impacts learning operations relationships and or safety. Based on the survey results and observations, this mindset is not fully embedded into the organizational culture and norms of how schools do business relative to student behavior.

- *What barriers and challenges do you think schools, and the school division will face in an effort to make this mindset shift?*

Q: Historically, prior codes of conduct and disciplinary practices emphasized a linear response between behavior and consequence. The primary function of those former codes of conduct was to define which behaviors warranted suspension, by whom, and for how long. The new model guidance requires a balance of instruction, intervention and support, as well as consequences.

- *What kinds of structural, organizational, and operational things are going to be necessary to create balance?*
- *Where do you anticipate encountering challenges that could influence buy-in and fidelity to the new model?*

APPENDIX E

January 28, 2021

Dear Prospective Research Participant,

Thank you for submitting a response to the Student Behavior and Discipline survey and for offering to participate in an interview for my dissertation study. The title of the dissertation is Institutionalized Perceptions of Student Behavior and The Student Conduct Paradigm Shift in Virginia's Public Schools. The purpose of this study is to identify and explore the beliefs instructional (regular and special education teachers), behavioral staff (interventionists, restorative counselors, deans) and school leaders (principals and assistant principals) hold relative to why children behave as they do, as well as the assumptions relative to how behavior concerns should be addressed.

You were identified as a prospective participant based on your voluntary response to the Student Behavior and Discipline Survey. Your feedback, as a **school administrator** in an urban school district in Virginia, is essential to both the study AND our division's planning as we move forward with the full implementation of the new Student Code of Conduct. Your participation will provide insight into the lens through which administrative staff view student behavior.

The interview will take between 45 and 60 minutes and be conducted via Zoom to ensure health safety as we are currently in a period of limited human contact due to COVID-19. A waiting room will be activated in Zoom to ensure we are not interrupted. The audio only of the interview will be recorded, with your permission, and kept in a secure location. I will submit the interview for transcription using an online transcription program. All responses are confidential and no identifying information will be revealed in the final report. Only authorized users will have access to recordings and original responses. If responses are used in writing, non-identifying information will be used.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please understand it is voluntary and you are able to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. You also have the right not to answer any question for any reason. I will attempt to schedule the administrator interviews on weekdays from **February 3 – 11, 2021** between **8:00 AM and 5:00 P**M. If you are available on any of the dates in that window, please respond via email or by phone [(757) 320-6758] to provide some date and time options that work for your schedule.

Upon agreement you will be sent a letter of consent electronically. This letter must be signed before moving forward. After I have your reply, I will be able to send a calendar invite with the Zoom link to confirm the time for the interview. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Hardy
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Foundations and Leadership
Darden College of Education
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia

Steve Myran, Ph.D.
Professor
Educational Foundations and Leadership
Darden College of Education
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia

January 28, 2021

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You were identified as a prospective participant based on your voluntary response to the Student Behavior and Discipline Survey. Your feedback, as a staff member responsible for supporting, managing, and/or responding to student **behavior** in an urban school district in Virginia, is essential to both the study AND our division's planning as we move forward with the full implementation of the new Student Code of Conduct. Your participation will provide insight into the lens through which behavioral staff view student behavior.

The interview will take between 45 and 60 minutes and be conducted via Zoom to ensure health safety as we are currently in a period of limited human contact due to COVID-19. A waiting room will be activated in Zoom to ensure we are not interrupted. The audio only of the interview will be recorded, with your permission, and kept in a secure location. I will submit the interview for transcription using an online transcription program. All responses are confidential and no identifying information will be revealed in the final report. Only authorized users will have access to recordings and original responses. If responses are used in writing, non-identifying information will be used.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please understand it is voluntary and you are able to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. You also have the right not to answer any question for any reason. I will attempt to schedule the behavior staff interviews on weekdays from **February 16** – **March 3, 2021** between **8:00 AM and 5:00 PM**. If you are available on any of the dates in that window, please respond via email or by phone [(757) 320-6758] to provide some date and time options that work for your schedule.

Upon agreement you will be sent a letter of consent electronically. This letter must be signed before moving forward. After I have your reply, I will be able to send a calendar invite with the Zoom link to confirm the time for the interview. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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Steve Myran, Ph.D.
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You were identified as a prospective participant based on your voluntary response to the Student Behavior and Discipline Survey. Your feedback, as a **teacher** in an urban school district in Virginia, is essential to both the study AND our division's planning as we move forward with the full implementation of the new Student Code of Conduct. Your participation will provide insight into the lens through which instructional staff view student behavior.

The interview will take between 45 and 60 minutes and be conducted via Zoom to ensure health safety as we are currently in a period of limited human contact due to COVID-19. A waiting room will be activated in Zoom to ensure we are not interrupted. The audio only of the interview will be recorded, with your permission, and kept in a secure location. I will submit the interview for transcription using an online transcription program. All responses are confidential and no identifying information will be revealed in the final report. Only authorized users will have access to recordings and original responses. If responses are used in writing, non-identifying information will be used.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please understand it is voluntary and you are able to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. You also have the right not to answer any question for any reason. I will attempt to schedule the teacher interviews on weekdays on weekdays from **February 16 – March 3, 2021** between **8:00 AM and 5:00 PM**. If you are available on any of the dates in that window, please respond via email or by phone [(757) 320-6758] to provide some date and time options that work for your schedule.

Upon agreement you will be sent a letter of consent electronically. This letter must be signed before moving forward. After I have your reply, I will be able to send a calendar invite with the Zoom link to confirm the time for the interview. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Tiffany D. Hardy

Steve Myran

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TIFFANY D. HARDY

Hampton, VA 23669. (757) 320-6758

wmkdldy@gmail.com

www.linkedin.com/in/tiffany-hardy-3357a773

EDUCATIONAL LEADER

Instructional Leadership • School Leadership • Curriculum Development • Professional Learning and Development • College and Career Preparation • Student Services • Career Academy Transformation

PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

- Accomplished educational leader with 25 years of experience in PreK – 12 public schools and central office administration.
- Dynamic presenter solicited to present at local, external school division, state, and national conferences.
- Three (3) years of experience as a graduate course instructor of Curriculum and Instruction course for teacher certification.
- Strong practical foundation and experience in areas of instruction, curriculum, and school leadership including: equity; instructional leadership; school accountability and improvement; curriculum development; program evaluation; resource allocation; student services; staff recruitment and selection; instructional coaching and evaluation; professional learning and development; extended and alternative services; alignment of written, taught and tested curriculum; data disaggregation; Response to Intervention; multi-tiered systems of intervention and support; comprehensive systems of care; social emotional learning; competencies; behavior intervention and restorative practices; Professional Learning Communities; career academies.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

DIRECTOR OF STUDENT SERVICES

Hampton City Schools, Hampton, VA **July 2019 - present**

- Facilitate division-wide paradigm shift to align school culture, protocols, school practices and board policies to the new Virginia Code of Student Conduct.
- Develop a division-wide multi-tiered system of care to align school, division, and community supports for learning, attendance, conduct and student well-being.
- Develop, implement, and monitor a tiered system of intervention and response to address well-being including student behavior, mental health, and social emotional needs.
- Develop a division-wide system of care including support, intervention, community assistance, and monitoring to address chronic absenteeism and truancy.
- Facilitate multi departmental and multi-agency teams to address student and family needs.
- Collaborate with directors/coordinators of psychological services, School Social Work services, school counseling services, Climate and Culture, and school safety to evaluate practices and develop appropriate action plans and professional development for school staff.
- Provide professional development to school teams relative to combating chronic absenteeism and truancy, positive and proactive behavioral response and restorative practices.

PRINCIPAL FOR INSTRUCTION, HAMPTON HIGH SCHOOL

Hampton City Schools, Hampton, VA **August 2014 - June 2019**

- Served as Instructional Leader for 160 staff and Executive Principal for 1500 students among four College and Career Academies.

- Implemented initiatives to develop a culture of literacy, culturally responsive teaching and learning, and equity for marginalized populations.
- Facilitated shared leadership among multiple layers of school leaders.
- Coached leadership development among assistant principals and instructional leaders.
- Fostered collaboration to create a community of learners and leaders.
- Supervised all initiatives related to instruction, staffing, intervention, career academies.
- Facilitated whole school and small group professional learning.
- Disaggregated formative and summative data to drive school improvement initiatives.
- Participated on various work teams and committees to support district-wide and state level initiatives.
- Participated in NSIP SAM project and presented at the related national conferences.

CURRICULUM LEADER FOR PREK-12 ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS
Hampton City Schools Hampton, VA December 2010 – August 2014

- Facilitated curriculum development, revision, monitoring, and implementation for K-12 English Language Arts for 30 elementary schools, 2 PreK-8 schools, 6 middle schools, 4 traditional high schools, 1 gifted center and 1 alternative learning center.
- Provided supervision, professional development, and monitoring to district-level teacher specialists, as well as school-based literacy leaders, reading interventionist, and elementary literacy coaches.
- Served as a member of the Academic Review team for schools in improvement.
- Collaborated with curriculum leaders for all other content areas to develop cross-curricular scope and sequence and resources.
- Researched and facilitated implementation of literacy assessments as well as culturally diverse, high interest, leveled texts and resources for all grade levels.
- Collaborated with the Special Education department to research, implement, and monitor literacy intervention programs.
- Served on the District Level Support Team for schools accredited with warning.
- Created and delivered division-wide and job-embedded training for school leaders and teachers, as well as presented at the state level for the VDOE.

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL, KECOUGHTAN HIGH SCHOOL
Hampton City Schools Hampton, VA August 2002 – December 2010

- Served as Assistant Principal for Instructional Leadership for 160 staff and 1700 students in grade 9-12.
- Supervised services for students receiving advanced academics, intervention, and specialized educational services.
- Facilitated internal teacher leadership, school-wide data analysis, and School Improvement Process.
- Coordinated programs including Summer School, Project Graduation, Advanced Placement, SACS CASI Accreditation, student transition programs, academic awards.
- Facilitated school-wide, departmental, and individual professional learning.
- Developed instructional resources for Reading Across the Curriculum and collaborative relative to best practices.
- Supervised core academic departments as well as extracurricular programs and activities.
- Conducted incident investigations, student intervention, due process hearings, and discipline.

ENGLISH TEACHER, KECOUGHTAN AND HAMPTON HIGH SCHOOLS
Hampton City Schools Hampton, VA August 1995 – August 2002

- Taught core English classes (traditional, honors, Advanced Placement) and elective courses (Acting, Reading Enhancement) in the traditional setting, as well as core English in an alternative program.
- Served on district-level curriculum writing teams
- Served diverse student populations as an English teacher.

- Achieved success well above local and state means for student achievement on Virginia SOLs, Advanced Placement, and SAT. Served as a teacher leader for accreditation, procedure, and instructional programs.

EDUCATION

PhD, Educational Leadership April 2021
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA

MS, Educational Administration, Supervision and Principal Licensure December 2000
Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA

BA, English with a concentration in Secondary Education August 1995
The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATION EXPERIENCE

Presented and facilitated wide range of professional development to adult learners, including: new teacher induction; high yield instructional strategies; results-driven lesson planning; curriculum, instruction, and assessment alignment; literacy leadership; balanced literacy; instructional coaching; social emotional learning; curriculum development; cultural competency; root-cause analysis; intervention alignment; tiered system of supports; comprehensive systems of care; corrective action planning; combating chronic absenteeism.

Presented at local, state and national conferences and served on state and national work teams:

- VDOE Principals in Action Conference, April 2021 (Presenter)
- VDOE Diploma Stakeholder team, March 2021 (Member)
- VDOE SEL Curriculum Framework work team, February - April 2021 (Member)
- VDOE Webinar: Reframing Discipline and Data Collection, February 2021 (Presenter)
- Culture of Literacy PD Series, Greensville County PS, December 2020 - January 2021 (Presenter)
- VDOE Webinar: Strategies for Supporting Attendance and Student Engagement, December 2020 (Presenter)
- National Career Academy Coalition Conference, November 2018 (Presenter)
- AFT Hampton Chapter Teacher's Workshop, September 2018 (Presenter)
- National SAM Innovation Project Annual Conferences, 2015 - 2019, (Presenter multiple years)
- SURN Leadership Academy at William & Mary, 2011 – 2016 (Presenter multiple years)
- Literacy Leadership, Hampton City Schools Leadership Academy, (2011, 2012, 2013) (Presenter)
- SACS CASI School Accreditation Conference, February 2007, 2008, 2009 (guest speaker 2009)
- HCS Leadership Institute, "Special Education Compliance" 2005 (Presenter)
- Shenandoah University Curriculum and Instruction Course for teacher candidates, 2005 - 2009 (Adjunct instructor)
- Public Speaking, Virginia State Conference for Office Professionals, 2000 (Presenter)

PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITIONS

Golden Key International Honor Society; Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society; VASSP 2008 Assistant Principal of the Year; National Board Certification (NBPTS, 2001) AYA/ELA; Cambridge *Who's Who of Professional Women in Education*; Manchester *Who's Who of Professional Women*; Kecoughtan HS 2002 Teacher of the Year; Governor's School 2001 Outstanding Teacher Presidential Recognition; ODU 2001 Outstanding Masters Student in Educational Administration.

PUBLICATIONS

- Cunningham, W. & Sanzo, T. (June, 2002). *High Stakes Testing*. NASSP Journal.
- Appendix materials, research and bibliography for Snowden, P.. *School Leadership and Administration: Important Concepts, Case Studies and Simulations*. (6th edition). McGraw-Hill.
- NASSP. (2009). *The Best of Principal Leadership for Assistant Principals.* NASSP Ed. Reston, VA.